



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
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N. 250110c

Friday 10.01.2025

Audience with leaders of the “Congrès Mission”

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the leaders of the “Congrès Mission”, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning. Welcome!

I am happy to meet you, the faces and hearts of the “*Congrès Mission*”. Thank you for your visit, and especially for your faithful commitment in the service of the Gospel, which is a source of light and hope in a world in great need.

As you prepare for your great gathering in Bercy, the Church has just entered a new jubilee year that invites us to be “*pilgrims of hope*”. It is a pressing call to renew our Christian life, which sends us on a mission: to become witnesses of a hope that never disappoints (cf. *Rom 5:5*), in the “joy of the Gospel” that “fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus” (Apostolic *Exhortation Evangelii gaudium*, 1). Joy, dear friends, is inseparable from hope, and it is also inseparable from mission; a joy that is not reduced to the enthusiasm of the moment, but that is born of the encounter with Christ and directs us towards our brothers and sisters. Being pilgrims means walking together in the Church, but also having the courage to go out, to encounter others. And bringing hope means offering the world a living word, a word rooted in the Gospel, which consoles and opens up new paths.

I encourage you never to be afraid of “going out”, because “mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for His people” (*ibid.*, 268). This means going where men and women live out their joys and their sufferings. This is how you bring hope, both in your communities and in the places where the Church at times seems tired or withdrawn. Thank you for what you do, thank you for your dynamism and your enthusiasm, for the missionary fraternity you weave patiently and faithfully across France. France, *la fille aînée de l'Église*. And the enemies of France say, yes, *la fille aînée de l'Église*, but not the most faithful... this is not true! France has many saints, many saints!

We know that hope is often put to the test. Our world is marked by war and by so many injustices; it is torn by individualism. All this often generates doubt, fear of the future and very often desperation. But we Christians bring a certainty: Christ is our hope. He is the door of hope, always. He is the good news for this world! And this hope – it is curious – does not belong to us. Hope is not a possession you can put in your pocket. No, it does not belong to us. It is a gift to share, a light to transmit. And if hope is not shared, it falls.

Do not be afraid to respond to this call! Being missionaries means letting oneself be shaken by the Holy Spirit. I recommend that you read the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles and see what the Holy Spirit does. It is the Spirit who guides the Church, He stirs hearts. And hope is born here. At times, letting oneself be shaken by the Holy Spirit can mean coming out of our habitual mindsets and even accepting to “mess up”. *The Holy Spirit is the Master*.

I remember a Mass for children, when I was a parish priest in the neighbourhood of San Miguel, where almost two hundred children came to Mass every Sunday. One day, it was Pentecost, I said to the children: “Do you know who the Holy Spirit is?”. “Pick me, me, me...!”. “You”. “The paralytic!” [Laughter]. “No! The Paraclete! What does it mean? “Me, me, me...!”. “You”. “The one who makes a mess!”. It is true, the Holy Spirit makes a mess. The Holy Spirit urges creativity! Look at the lives of the saints: all creative, because there is the Spirit within! The Holy Spirit invites us to proclaim the Gospel not only in consolidated structures, but everywhere our brothers and sisters find themselves: proclaiming the Gospel in everyday life, in their joys, in their wounds, in their questions. Blessed Father Chevrier said: “Love for God and neighbour is the principle, it is the lifeblood of everything, which must produce everything in us; when there is this in a soul, there is everything. Charity without exteriority is worth more than an exteriority without charity. Better disorder with love than order without love” (*Le véritable disciple*, Sion 2010, 223).

Dear friends, I also want to encourage you to encourage young people. Young people are the first pilgrims of hope! They thirst for meaning, authenticity and true encounters. But be careful, let the young meet with the elderly, because the elderly are also witnesses of hope. Young people, when they go to the elders, receive some special mission. Do this work, which is very important. Help young people to discover Christ, because Christ is the answer. Help them to grow in faith, to dare to make courageous choices and to become missionary disciples of Jesus, living witnesses of the Gospel. Pass on to them the boldness to dream of a more fraternal world and accompany them, so that they may become artisans of hope in their families, schools and workplaces.

In this missionary dynamic, I urge you never to lose sight of the communion between you. Unity is a powerful witness: it is from the love we have for each other that the world recognizes that we are disciples of Jesus. Take care of each other, support one another in your labours and rejoice together in the fruits that the Spirit brings forth through your efforts.

I encourage you to prepare for the great gathering of November 2025, and I assure you of my prayer that it may be a moment of joy, conversion, and renewal for the Church in France.

I entrust you to the Virgin Mary, caring and faithful pilgrim, who carried the hope of the world in her heart and in her arms. May she accompany you and guide you in this mission. I bless you from my heart and please do not forget to pray for me. *Le Seigneur vous bénisse*.
