

Saint John Paul II: Missionary Pope

The Catholic Church worldwide rejoiced as John Paul II, along with John XXIII, was canonized by Pope Francis on April 27, 2014 in Rome. Catholic and secular media covered the event, emphasizing the many contributions of this 264th pope of the Catholic Church whose pontificate extended over 26 years (1978-2005).

One of the major emphases of John Paul II was his focus on the renewal of the Church in her missionary identity and commitment. When his mission encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) was published on December 7, 1990, Cardinal Daneels of Brussels wrote: "this document best exemplifies who this pope is; it is the fruit of his mission in every continent. There is nothing better to define his pontificate than to say: he is a missionary pope."

In RM (1) the pope described his missionary commitment: "From the beginning of my pontificate I have chosen to travel to the ends of the earth in order to show this missionary concern. My direct contact with peoples who do not know Christ has convinced me even more of the *urgency of missionary activity....*" John Paul II echoed his explicit pastoral choice in his Message for World Mission Sunday in 1981: "My trips to Latin America, Asia and Africa have an eminently missionary purpose." Everywhere he went John Paul II emphasized a central point: "I wish to invite the Church to *renew her missionary commitment*" (RM 2).

Saint John Paul II continually asserted that mission is at the heart of the Church: "the Church here on earth is missionary by her very nature" (AG 2). He was deeply convinced that "missionary activity renews the Church.... *Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!*" (RM 2). Pope Francis said of John Paul II: "I think of him as 'the great missionary of the Church'," because he was "a man who proclaimed the Gospel everywhere."