

## **VATICAN - The true meaning and purpose of any genuine missionary journey: to give people the living and personal Gospel, the Lord Jesus Himself**

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) – "In the Virgin Mary who goes to visit her relative Elizabeth, we recognize the clearest example and the truest meaning of our way as believers and the way of the Church herself. The Church is missionary by nature, called to proclaim the Gospel everywhere and always, to transmit the faith to every man and woman, and in every culture." These were the words spoken by the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI on the evening of May 31, before the Lourdes Grotto in the Vatican Gardens, at the end of the celebration held for the closing of the Month of May. Referring to the liturgy of the day, the feast of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary, the Pope said that "Mary's is a true missionary journey. It is a journey that leads her far from home, leading her into the world, in places foreign to her daily activities; it makes her reach, in a sense, to the very ends of where she can reach. It is precisely here, for ourselves as well, wherein lies the secret of our lives as mankind and as Christians. Our existence, as individuals and as a Church, is a life that is projected outside of us. As was the case with Abraham, we are asked to come out of ourselves, emerge from the places wherein lies our security, to go towards others, into diverse places and environments. It is the Lord who asks us... It is always the Lord who, on this path, places Mary beside us as a traveling companion and caring mother."

According to St. Luke the Evangelist, Mary stayed with Elizabeth, now elderly, for nearly three months, "in order to offer her an affectionate assistance, a concrete help and all those daily services she needed. Elizabeth became the symbol of so many elderly and sick, indeed, of all people in need of help and love," said the Holy Father. However, Mary's love "reaches its highest point in giving Jesus Himself, as Luke points out: "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb" (Lk 1:41). The Pope then continued: "We thus arrive at the heart and summit of the mission of evangelization. We have reached the truest meaning and the most genuine purpose of any missionary journey: to give people the living and personal Gospel, the Lord Jesus Himself. This implies a communication and a donation which, as evidenced by Elizabeth, fills the heart with joy ... Jesus is the true and only treasure that we must give humanity. It is for Him that the men and women of our time have a deep longing, even when they seem to ignore or reject Him. He is the one that the society in which we live, Europe, and the entire world have such a great need of." Benedict XVI concluded his speech by stressing that "we are entrusted with this extraordinary responsibility" and urging all to live it "with joy and commitment, so that our civilization is really a civilization in which truth, justice, freedom, and love reign as the fundamental and indispensable pillars of a truly orderly and peaceful coexistence." (SL) (Agenzia Fides 01/06/2010)