Vatican

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By virtue of their baptism, all Catholics are called to be missionaries, sharing the good news of salvation in Jesus by their actions and their words, Pope Francis said.

"The importance of renewing the church's missionary commitment and giving fresh evangelical impulse to her work of preaching and bringing to the world the salvation of Jesus Christ" is the focus of Pope Francis' message for World Mission Sunday Oct. 20 and for the special celebration in 2019 of October as "Missionary Month."

The pope's message, "Baptized and sent: the church of Christ on mission in the world," was published by the Vatican June 9.

The special "Missionary Month" will mark the 100th anniversary of Pope Benedict XV's 1919 apostolic letter "Maximum Illud" on the church's missionary activity.

The document, Pope Francis said, has two key messages that Catholics need to hear today: every Christian has a responsibility to share the Gospel; and the universality of salvation in Jesus means that all people are children of God and brothers and sisters to each other, which means rejecting "all forms of nationalism and

ethnocentrism or the merging of the preaching of the Gospel with the economic and military interests of colonial powers."

Baptism and membership in the church go together and are essential for salvation, the pope said. And they also can contribute to peace and harmony in the world.

The mission of sharing the Gospel and offering them the gift of baptism "is part of our identity as Christians," the pope said. "It makes us responsible for enabling all men and women to realize their vocation to be adoptive children of the Father, to recognize their personal dignity and to appreciate the intrinsic worth of every human life, from conception until natural death."

When God is rejected as the father of all, he wrote, people no longer recognize each other as brothers and sisters and no longer feel obligated to respect each other's lives.

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"Without the God of Jesus Christ, every difference is reduced to a baneful threat, making impossible any real fraternal acceptance and fruitful unity within the human race," Pope Francis wrote.

As members of God's family, he said, Catholics are called to leave behind "every kind of undue ethnic and ecclesial introversion," valuing those things of their own culture that can reflect or amplify the Gospel but being always ready to step out of one's comfort zone to share the faith.

The gift of faith and baptism, he said, "is not a product for sale — we do not practice proselytism — but a treasure to be given, communicated and proclaimed."

Catholics should feel an irresistible urge to share the blessing of faith with others, Pope Francis wrote, saying it is like being in love. "People in love never stand still: they are drawn out of themselves; they are attracted and attract others in turn; they give themselves to others and build relationships that are life-giving."

Pope Francis also used his message to praise the pontifical mission societies for raising awareness of and support for the church's missionary work.

All Catholics must be missionaries, pope says in message.