



The Holy See

***LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER
JOHN PAUL II
TO SR CAROLA THOMANN
PRESIDENT-IN-TURN OF THE CONFERENCE
OF THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY***

To Reverend Sister Carola Thomann

President-in-turn of the Conference of the Franciscan Family

1. I am happy to extend my cordial greeting to the whole Franciscan Family, gathered in the Basilica of the Most Holy Saviour in Rome to celebrate the Great Jubilee. I am united in spirit with them, praising the Lord for the witness offered to the Church by those who have chosen to follow the example of St Francis faithfully.

In addressing you, Reverend Mother, I want to express my sentiments of esteem and affection to the leaders of the three orders that comprise the great family of the followers of the *Poverello* of Assisi, and to the many people who, in various ways, take their inspiration from him in a multiplicity of forms of dress and works. I want to express to everyone my appreciation for your having desired to celebrate the Great Jubilee together, assembled in the cathedral of the Bishop of Rome, as a sign of communion with him. How could we fail to recall that it was in this very same sacred place that St Francis received the approval of his Rule, which has become a guide to holiness for generations of brothers and sisters who have since joined the Franciscan movement?

2. May the spirit of faith that nourished the words and witness of St Francis, St Clare, St Louis and St Elisabeth of Hungary, as well as of all the saints and blessed of the great Franciscan family, flourish anew in the hearts of their sons and daughters who are making their Jubilee pilgrimage with faith and devotion! It is a journey of conversion and renewal that leads them to adore the Mystery that the Holy Year solemnly commemorates: the birth of the Son of God, his passion, death and glorious resurrection.

Rich though he was, Christ became poor for us, so that we might become rich by his poverty (cf. 2 *Cor* 8: 9); he became man in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the servant, dwelling, tabernacle and palace of the Son of man (cf. *Sal BVM* 4-5). Christ is the true "Holy Door" of the Jubilee, the threshold to be crossed with a joyful, penitent spirit, so as to reinvigorate the gift of faith and commitment to mission.

3. St Francis received within himself without reserve Jesus, the Word made flesh, the only "Word" that fully reveals the Most High God. He is the only "Way" that leads every person to the Father, in the Spirit, through the faithful and consistent observance of the Gospel. The crucified Lord became the irreplaceable paradigm of thought, desire and action for the *Poverello* of Assisi. For this reason he set out to follow his humble, poor and chaste life, obedient to the will of the Father even unto death on the cross. Francis let himself be marked inwardly with the *tau* of the redeemed (cf. *Ezr* 9: 4) and, wandering through the countryside and cities, he taught everyone that in the Cross of Christ is their indispensable support for crossing fearlessly the tempestuous seas of life.

A short time later the Father of the penitents was joined by St Clare, the first "little plant" and Mother of the Order of Poor Ladies (cf. *LM* IV, 6). Her soul ardently in love with her heavenly Bridegroom, she wanted her life to be a faithful "mirror" of the Son of God and his most holy Mother, in order to sing in the humble cloister of San Damiano the ineffable love of God, ever mindful that the soul of the believer must always respond to such condescension with intense sentiments of love (cf. 4 *EpAg* 19-26). In imitation of St Francis, for her too Christ became the Way, the Door and the Means for entering the kingdom of heaven and for dwelling there forever.

4. The countless multitude of brothers and sisters who to this very day have followed the footprints of Christ in imitation of Sts Francis and Clare are a shining example of the fruitfulness of the Minorite charism. This is the treasure of holiness with which the sons and daughters of the two mendicants of Assisi have enriched the Church. They went about the world blessing many persons to whom they offered the enticing proposal of their original experience of the Gospel. May they not be a mere glory of the past, but also an example for the present, so as to prepare a future in which the proclamation of the love of God in Christ may always resound!

In today's society, which strongly resounds with the invitation to treasure with all one's heart that "which passes away", it is most necessary to recall and bear credible witness to the fact that God alone, our highest and only Good, is the true wealth that fills our life with meaning. God is the true hope, joy and profound happiness that the world's allurements and promises cannot give (cf. *LDio*).

5. I would now like to address you directly, dear members of the great Franciscan Family. May the Jubilee be a decisive visitation of God's saving love in your life and an extraordinary event of grace that spurs you to bring to the men and women of every nation and race the mercy and peace that the Seraphic Father taught and lived. May you be prepared to welcome every person who is

seeking the ultimate meaning of life; do not hesitate to travel the highways and byways of every continent to proclaim the Gospel "*sine glossa*"; offer each person the greeting of "peace and all good" that has characterized the Franciscan family since the time of the *Poverello*.

May the protection of Mary, Queen of Angels and of the Seraphic Order, and the intercession of the Franciscan saints and blessed help you to be fervent apostles of the new evangelization.

"May the Lord give you peace!": may this be the pledge and programme of your apostolate.

Proclaim to all that Christ is our peace and call upon him in unceasing prayer.

As I assure you of my prayerful remembrance for the success of this your spiritual event, I invoke abundant graces on each of those present and I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to all.

From the Vatican, 8 April 2000.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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