



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF SUPERIORS GENERAL

To the International Union of Superiors General

1. I address you with great joy, dear Superiors who have come from every part of the world for the regular meeting of the International Union of Superiors General. You have gathered in order to reflect on the problems and the hopes of consecrated life at the beginning of the third millennium so that you can continue to be, in full fidelity to your charisms, a sign of Christ's love. Not being able to receive you in audience because of the pilgrimage in the footsteps of St Paul, which will take me to Athens, Damascus and Malta in the coming days, I gladly address this Message to you, thanks to which God has allowed me to be with you, at least in spirit.

You have gathered in Rome in order to reflect on a theme that marvellously unites not only the enriching diversity of your charisms in the Church, but also the pluralism of cultures that make your traditions meaningful. May the longing of the Apostle Paul make you of one heart: "*Charitas Christi urget nos!*" (the charity of Christ urges us) (II Cor 5,14). In this world, torn by many contradictions, you intend, with your "feminine" identity to "*be a living presence of the tenderness and the mercy of God*". Only in the strength of the charity of Christ can religious communities respond effectively to the challenges of the modern world and become a living message of communion for a new humanity that flows from the mercy and tenderness of God.

2. May communion with God-Love, to whom you wish to reserve the primacy in every choice, characterize your consecrated life. This God, to whom you have given yourselves as a free and conscious gift, is the God of Jesus Christ, the God of Love, of Relation (whose inner life consists of the relations between Father, Son and Spirit), God-Trinity. He involves our littleness in his own dynamic of love and unity. But how can we belong to a God of communion if we do not share this communion with those close to us, expressing it concretely in life? In the Post-Synodal Exhortation "*Vita consecrata*" I wished to emphasize that "more than an instrument for carrying out a specific

mission, fraternal communion *is a God-enlightened space* in which to experience the hidden presence of the Risen Lord" (n. 42) and most recently, in the apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, I noted that the "spirituality of communion" means the "heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and *whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us*" (n. 43). The same call Jesus addressed to you, to which each of you has responded with the gift of her life, cannot be fulfilled without entering into communion with the whole world for love of God.

3. In order to recognize Christ and the Church, the world also needs your witness. So do not be discouraged if you meet with difficulties. At times it can seem as if love, justice and faithfulness are no longer present in today's world. Do not be afraid; the Lord is with you, he goes before you and accompanies you with his faithful love. Bear witness with your lives to what you believe!

There is a need for the strong and free witness of your *vow of poverty, lived with love and joy*, so that your sisters and brothers understand that the only "treasure" is God with his saving love. Poverty protects chastity and prevents you from becoming slaves of needs artificially created by the civilization of well-being. Freed from all that is superfluous, you will give your poverty the evangelical face of the freedom and trust of those who are certain that God provides for his children. You are not asked to be powerful, but to be holy!

There is need for your *faithful and transparent chastity* that "proclaims", in the silence of its daily gift, the mercy and tenderness of the Father, and cries to the world that there is a "greater love" that fills the heart and life, because it makes room for our brother, as the Apostle suggests: "Bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6,2). Do not be afraid of bearing witness to this great gift of God. Young people observe you. May they be able to learn from you that there is a love different from that which the world proclaims, a faithful, total love, capable of risk. Virginity, lived for love of Jesus, is more prophetic today than ever before!

There is need for your *responsible obedience, full of availability* for God, through the people that He puts on your path. You are called to show, with your life, that true freedom lies in entering decisively into the way marked and blessed by obedience, the way of death and resurrection that Jesus has shown to us by his example. Remember his cry, of solitude and abandonment to the Father: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Mt 26,39) (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 26). Live obedience in communion. Do not let individualism threaten your communities. May those who carry out the service of authority always work hard so that all the sisters witness to a profound communion with the Magisterium of the Church, especially when a secularized and hedonistic mentality attempts to dispute fundamental truths and moral norms. May your obedience consist in unlimited abandonment to the Fathers plans of the Father, as it did for Jesus.

4. Charity toward our neighbor draws its strength from abandonment to God's love. "Now is the

time for a new "creativity' in charity" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 50), that develops in relief agencies although they are so necessary, but in "getting close' to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters" (ibid.).

Religious life, in order to find itself again, must rediscover contact with the people so that they can know it for what it is: God's gift to men and women in the mystery of communion that enlivens the Church. You will always understand more deeply the vitality of the charism that God has given you, through your founders and foundresses, the more you put yourself at the service of others starting from the poorest. Every charism is given for the life of the world. Contemplation as well as evangelization, service to the marginalized and to the sick as well as teaching, are always in dialogue with humanity, that same humanity for whom God did not hesitate to send his Son, so that he might *give his life* for our redemption.

How often has it been said that today we do not need teachers as much as witnesses! Therefore be witnesses of the Gospel, faithful to God and faithful to man. Religious life, precisely because of the strength of faith in Christ's presence in his Church "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28,20), will then live with the whole Ecclesial Community a "new impetus in Christian living" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 29), making the divine presence the inspiring force of its journey.

The certainty of God's presence in your lives helps you to understand the relationship between consecrated life and Gospel proclamation. God wants to need your personal and community availability to his Spirit, so that humanity understands and finally discovers his mercy and tenderness for every creature. St Paul affirms: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (II Cor 12,10). Why? Because God is not afraid of man's weakness, as long as his mercy is accepted.

5. Dear Superiors General, I am with you in spirit and I accompany you with prayer, thinking that every religious vocation in the Church carries a renewed message of hope. We can say that a woman's heart is created to bring the message of God's mercy and tenderness to the world. So I gladly entrust you to the Virgin Mary, the first consecrated woman, who in obedience became the Mother of God. And with trust I repeat: "Let us go forward in hope!... Did we not celebrate the Jubilee Year in order to refresh our contact with this living source of hope? Now, the Christ whom we have contemplated and loved bids us to set out once more on our journey" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 58).

From the Vatican, 14 May 2001

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