



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CONGREGATION
OF THE FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF ST. ANTHONY**

*To Mother Maria Goretti Manzo,
Superior General of the Franciscan Sisters of St Anthony*

1. Together with the Chapter Sisters, you expressed with filial devotion your desire to meet the Successor of Peter during your fraternity's General Chapter which coincides with the centenary of your Institute. Grateful for the affection you have shown me by your presence, I greet you, Reverend Mother, and the General Council that assists you; I greet the capitulars gathered here and through you convey my fatherly appreciation to all the Franciscan Sisters of St Anthony who are committed to working for the Lord in the different parts of the world.

Dear Sisters, I encourage you to continue generously to "serve your neediest brethren, living in poverty, simplicity, humility, charity, sacrifice, prayer and joy, in accordance with the ideal of St Francis of Asisi", as your Rule says.

In commemorating the first centenary of your religious family's birth, how can you not give thanks to God who through his Spirit has called you in your lowliness to follow the poor, chaste and obedient Christ? This special event is a favourable opportunity to renew your witness of love and fidelity to the Lord and to his Church, reaffirming your sincere and full adherence to the charism.

2. You were founded to serve the poor and the needy. In those who come knocking at your door for help, support and comfort in their troubles, it is Christ himself who is present and asking you to let him in. This is how your foundress, Mother Miradio Bonifacio, who died 65 years ago, liked to present your apostolate. How often would she turn to Jesus, trustfully calling on his holy Name! We can say that the Name of Jesus became the inexhaustible source of her charity and good deeds.

She also showed you where to find Christ and draw light and support to respond to the needs of

your brothers and sisters. It is the mystery of the Eucharist that draws from the fount of love. May you therefore continue to draw from Eucharistic adoration your apostolic and missionary zeal and commitment. Work for the glory of God, serving those who are the poorest and most forsaken.

May the Eucharist be your daily source of nourishment and support. St Francis, whose charism inspires you, recalls that "we possess and see nothing corporally of the Most High himself in this world, except his Body and Blood, the names and words by which we are created and redeemed from death to life" (*FF 207/a*).

As well as love for the Blessed Sacrament of the altar, your venerable foundress wanted to leave you a special legacy: unconditional trust in divine Providence. From God she expected full support to carry out the charitable projects that the Spirit inspired in her heart. In Jesus, the Redeemer of mankind, she found that style of practical attention to the person and to all his needs which was the hallmark of her apostolic activity. Indeed she strove to work for the glory of the Lord in the service of her brethren, by living in total love for Christ and his Church, and by devoting herself without reserve to the service of her brethren.

3. Dear Franciscans of St Anthony, follow the road on which your foundress set out faithfully and without stopping. The Church is also counting on your contribution in order to proclaim Christ to our contemporaries. "The Church", I wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, "and society itself needs people capable of devoting themselves totally to God and to others for the love of God. The Church can in no way renounce the consecrated life, for it eloquently expresses her inmost nature as "Bride" (n. 105).

Incarnate the Gospel Beatitudes with joy, simplicity and charity, with trusting abandonment to God's providential and merciful love, in accordance with the ideal of St Francis of Assisi. The Christian people expect this of you, so that you may help them grow in unconditional adherence to their divine Teacher and Pastor.

Always be united by fraternal communion, supported by the hope that does not disappoint (cf. *Rom 5,5*). Sensitive to the mandate of the Lord who sends out his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all the nations, you too should cultivate deep missionary zeal. Be everywhere witnesses of the merciful love of God.

Look to the Immaculate Virgin Mary, to whom I entrust anew your religious family and its goals. May Mary, to whom your foundress turned with humble, filial devotion, support your apostolate with her powerful intercession. May Sts Francis and Anthony protect you likewise, as well as the shining ranks of God's friends who have branched out from the Franciscan tree.

May my wishes for peace and good accompany you, along with a special Apostolic Blessing.

From Castel Gandolfo, 20 August, 2001.

JOHN PAUL II

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