



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE GENERAL DIRECTOR
OF THE LITTLE WORK OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE**

To the Very Reverend Father Roberto Simionato
General Director of the Little Work of Divine Providence

1. With joy I learned that this Institute is commemorating the centenary of its canonical approval by Bishop Iginio Bandi of Tortona. On this happy occasion, I am pleased to address to you, to the General Council and to the members of the entire Congregation a cordial greeting and the assurance of my spiritual participation in the various observances that will certainly help to revive the fervour of your origins, so that you may continue with unswerving enthusiasm the journey your Founder began more than 100 years ago.

2. The cleric Luigi Orione, a former student of Don Bosco in Turin, was only 20 years old when he opened the *first Oratory* [recreation centre] in Tortona, and the following year, 1893, he became a founder, setting up a "small house with boarding facilities" and a school for poor boys. In the events of daily life, lived with faith and charity, the plan for which divine Providence destined him began to unfold. In a letter dated 4 April 1897, he wrote to the future Cardinal Perosi, his fellow-citizen and friend, who had asked him about his "idea": "It seems to me that Our Lord Jesus Christ is calling me to a state of great charity ... but it is a great and gentle fire that needs to expand and set the whole world on fire. In the shadow of every bell tower a Catholic school will rise, in the shadow of every Cross there will be a hospital: the mountains will make way for the great love of Jesus Our Lord, and everything will be restored and purified by Jesus" (*The Spirit of Don Orione*, I,2).

It was precisely because he burned with this mystical fire that Don Orione overcame the obstacles and difficulties of the early days and became an unflinching, creative and effective apostle. Some of his companions in the seminary followed the cleric-founder; many of the students dreamt of being priests like him. The *Work*, which from the start he named "*of Divine Providence*", expanded

with numerous members and activities. The Bishop of Tortona anxiously followed the development of those daring, humanly fragile initiatives, and he knew how to discern the action of the Spirit. With a Decree of 21 March 1903, the Bishop approved the charism and the constitution of the male religious Congregation, the *Sons of Divine Providence*, which included priests, hermits and coadjutor brothers. Later, the *Little Missionary Sisters of Charity* were born, and from them sprang two contemplative branches, the *Blind Sacramentine Sisters*, and the *Contemplatives of the Crucified Jesus*, while more recently the *Don Orione Secular Institute* and the *Don Orione Lay Movement* have come into being.

3. On the occasion of this Jubilee, I am pleased to express my deep gratitude to all of you, members of the Don Orione family, for your effective contribution to the Church's mission in recent years. I also want to recall what I wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*: "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished!" (n. 110). I therefore invite you to look to the future, "where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things" (*ibid.*).

Dear Sons of Divine Providence, the Church expects you to rekindle the gift that is in you (cf. II Tim 1,6) renewing your resolutions and, in a changing world, you should promote your vocation with creative fidelity. In the same Apostolic Exhortation, I said: "Institutes of consecrated life are thus invited courageously to propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today's world. This invitation is first of all a call to perseverance on the path of holiness in the midst of the material difficulties of daily life. But it is also a call to pursue competence in personal work and to develop a dynamic fidelity to their mission, and, if need be, adapting forms to new situations and different needs, in complete openness to God's inspiration and to the Church's discernment" (*ibid.*, n. 37).

Only by remaining firmly rooted in divine life and keeping the spirit of your origins intact will you be able to respond prophetically to the needs of the present era. The primary obligation of every baptized person and, even more so, of every consecrated person, is to tend toward holiness; and it would certainly be "a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 31). In your blessed Founder's style, and in line with the character of the religious life that you have embraced, do not be afraid to seek with patience and constancy "*this high standard of ordinary Christian living*", with recourse to "*a genuine "training in holiness"*" (*ibid.*) for yourselves, personally, and for the community, which is firmly anchored in the rich ecclesial tradition and open to dialogue with the new times.

4. *Creative fidelity in a changing world*: may this orientation guide you so that, as Don Orione loved to repeat, you may "keep up with the times". If the observances for the centenary of canonical approval are an incentive to "remember", reviving the spirit of your beginnings, at the same time, may they direct you, in view of your coming General Chapter, to "plan" new and

courageous charitable initiatives.

May the spirit of your first hour remain unchanged! In this regard, I would like to highlight an important aspect of the charismatic intuition of the cleric Luigi Orione: his superior and unifying love for "Holy Mother Church". Then, as now, it is fundamental for your Work to foster this deep passion for the Church, so that you may "cooperate with humility, at the feet of the Apostolic See and of the Bishops, to renew and to unify in Jesus Christ our Lord mankind and society, by bringing the heart of abandoned children, the poor and the working classes to the Church and to the Pope: in order to restore all things in Christ, so that there may be one flock and one shepherd" (*Constitutions*, art. 5).

May Don Orione continue to accompany you from Heaven, along with all the confreres who, throughout these hundred years, spent their lives serving Christ and the poor. May the Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church, watch over you and obtain, as Don Orione prayed, that you "consecrate [your] whole life to giving Christ to people, and people to Christ's Church; may she shine bright in Christ, and in Christ to be consumed in the enlightened bringing of the Gospel to the poor, may [your] life and death be the sweetest song of charity, and a holocaust to the Lord" (*The Spirit of Don Orione*, IX, 131).

With affection I assure you of my constant remembrance in prayer, as I wholeheartedly bless your entire spiritual family and all those you care for daily.