



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS**

Friday, 9 October 1989

Dear Sisters,

1. Welcome to this meeting by which you have desired to express your affectionate devotion to the Vicar of Christ and your renewed fidelity to his Magisterium as the universal Pastor of the Church, at the end of your 17th General Chapter.

I greet Mother Adele Brambilla, whom I congratulate on her recent election as Superior General, expressing my best wishes for heavenly lights so that she can lead the Comboni Missionary Sisters to new heights of apostolic zeal and service to their poorest brothers and sisters.

I extend a special greeting to Mother Mariangela Sardi, the outgoing Superior General, and I express my deep appreciation of her generous and competent work, hoping that she will continue to serve the missionary cause and the Church with the enthusiasm and wisdom of those who have given their whole life to the Lord. Lastly, I greet all of you, who represent the commitment of the entire congregation to the poor and to those who do not know Christ. Thank you for all the good you do, thank you for being discreet and diligent builders of the civilization of love in the world!

2. "The love of Christ impels us" (2 Cor 5:14). One hundred years since the first General Chapter, the Apostle Paul's words continue to ring out in your institute, motivating you "to work in every part of the world in order to consolidate and expand the kingdom of Christ, bringing the proclamation of the Gospel even to the most far-off regions" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 78). In this century of history, your congregation has grown and spread to many nations in Africa, Asia, America and Europe.

Therefore, during these days of study and prayer, you have wished first of all to give thanks to the

Lord for all the good you are doing in the world through your institute. Thanks to you, the joyous and liberating news of the Gospel is being proclaimed in many regions and the Lord's merciful love is witnessed to and made visible through your involvement in education, health care and social development. Recently, the Lord has also wished to give you a special sign of his favour by calling some of your sisters, in particular those who work in Southern Sudan and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to share in the mystery of his Cross.

3. The invitation to go and proclaim salvation to every creature (cf. Mt 28:19), which the Lord has extended to each one of you, opens to your hearts as women totally dedicated to the Gospel cause an horizon that is sometimes complex and full of suffering, but also rich in hopes and possibilities.

Insistent appeals come to you from the peoples who, on various continents and especially in Africa, still do not believe in Christ: from the masses of evacuees, immigrants, refugees, men and women crowded into the great urban outskirts of Third World countries, or children abandoned and alone, victims of shameful exploitation and hunger; from women who in so many developing countries are waiting for their dignity to be defended and to take a leading role in family, civil and ecclesial life.

How then can we fail to look at the problems of justice, peace and environmental protection, which in a way form a new mission frontier, or those arising from the urgent need for interreligious dialogue, especially in countries where Islam is the religion of the majority? And what are we to say of the tragedies caused by wars and ethnic conflicts?

4. These critical situations give you as many opportunities to examine what you have done so far and challenge you to find new ways for the mission *ad gentes*. By following Bl. Daniel Comboni's example, may you be holy and daring, tireless and enthusiastic missionaries in the Church, looking to the future with hope and the burning desire to "make Christ the heart of the world".

This attitude will help you experience the growing international and multicultural dimensions of your communities as a treasure to be accepted with gratitude and as an opportunity to bear witness, despite the selfishness that prevails, to the universal brotherhood that is born of faith in Christ. Thus your congregation will be able to face with tranquillity and hope the problems of decreasing numbers and ageing, and with courage and conviction invest its energy and resources in increasing mission awareness in the Church, in the continuing formation of the institute's members and in the pastoral care of vocations.

By entrusting yourselves totally to the One to whom "nothing is impossible" (Lk 1:37), and supported by the power of faith and love alone, you will be witnesses of solidarity for everyone you meet, and "making common cause" with the weakest, you will open many hearts to the demands of justice and peace.

5. In calling you the “Pie Madri della Nigrizia”, your founder, whom I had the joy of beatifying on 17 March 1996, wanted to entrust you with the task of being a privileged expression of the Church’s motherhood for the poor of Africa and throughout the world.

Dear Comboni Missionary Sisters, I invite you each day to learn from Mary how to live your charism with enthusiasm. May her motherly love sustain you in the labours and joys of your missionary commitment and help you to be for the lowly and the poor a luminous sign of God’s tenderness.

With these wishes, as I invoke Bl. Daniel Comboni’s protection, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to each of you, to the sisters living in difficult mission situations, to the young women in formation, to the sisters who are elderly and ill, and to the entire congregation.

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