



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CONGREGATION
OF THE SONS OF MERCIFUL LOVE**

*To Father General Maximiano Lucas
Superior General of the Congregation of the Sons of Merciful Love*

1. I learned with joy that this year your religious family is celebrating its 50th anniversary, and I very gladly join in your thanksgiving to the Lord on this happy occasion.

Fifty years ago, inspired by the Lord, the Servant of God Mother Speranza Alhama Valera began your Institute. As you recall that day with thanksgiving, dear Sons of Merciful Love, may you sing a common hymn of praise to Almighty God. As you remember your venerable foundress' teaching, you should thank Him "who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (*Eph 1,3*). At the same time, united in one heart, you intend to renew your allegiance to the Magisterium of the Successor of Peter.

2. This significant anniversary offers you the opportunity to meditate on your distinctive charism as well as give thanks to God. This is what you plan to do at the symposium that is taking place these days at Collevaenza, on the theme: *"The Sons of Divine Love and Priestly Brotherhood"*. This theme, which clearly illustrates your mission and service to priests, encourages you to be daring, tireless apostles of divine mercy everywhere.

In the words of the Apostle Paul, I express my hope "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (*Eph 3, 17-19*). Indeed, it is his love that you must spread; it is his grace that you are called to communicate with every means at your disposal.

"God who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead

through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (*Eph 2, 4-6*). Think often of these words that the Apostle Paul spoke to the Ephesians. A priest's life embodies the "mystery of mercy". This is what I wanted to recall in the Letter I sent this year to the priests of the whole world for Holy Thursday.

Even if the present-day mentality, more than that of the past, seems to want to remove from life and from the human heart the very idea of mercy, we need to continue to proclaim the absolutely free initiative by which God has chosen us and loves us. "Mercy", I observed in the cited *Letter to Priests*, "is his deigning to call us to act as his representatives, though he knows that we are sinners ... [it] is the forgiveness which he never refuses us" (n. 6).

3. I recall with gratitude the pilgrimage I had the joy of making to the Shrine of Merciful Love at Collevaenza 20 years ago. It was my first apostolic journey after the event in St Peter's Square on 13 May. I am now returning on a spiritual pilgrimage to Collevaenza, where your community is meeting for the Jubilee celebrations. Together with you I kneel and contemplate the great, moving Crucifix, before which so many pilgrims stop to pray.

From the pierced Heart of the Redeemer streams the infinite source of merciful love. God is "rich in mercy": may your whole life be a hymn of praise to this sublime mystery of salvation. Make everyone you meet in your daily apostolate feel that the Heavenly Father is always "particularly close to man, especially when man is suffering, when he is under threat at the very heart of his existence and dignity" (*Dives in misericordia*, n. 2).

Yes! Welcome and spread the Lord's love, a love that understands and renews all things; a love that embraces every man and the whole of man; a love that changes sorrow into joy, darkness into light, death into life. In a world marked by loneliness and anguish, you are asked to shine with the truth and warmth of the divine Lord, our source of peace and hope.

4. Dear Sons of Merciful Love! Fifty years are not a great deal for a religious institute, but they are an important milestone. In these days you are appropriately thinking back to your origins, to look to the future with a more generous zeal. The Church is counting on you! At the dawn of a new millennium, she is asking you to put out into the deep with trust, keeping your eyes fixed on Christ.

May Mary, the Mother of the Word made Man, walk beside you and support you. With the total confidence that was shown by your Foundress, turn to Mary, who with her total availability was the "handmaid of the Lord" (*Lk 1.38*) and made her life a hymn of praise and blessing to God's immense tenderness.

For my part, dear Father, I assure you of my prayers while I bless you, the members of the Institute and all the members of your spiritual family.

From Castel Gandolfo, 11 August 2001

JOHN PAUL II

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