



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
OF THE HANDMAIDS OF THE VISITATION**

*To Reverend Mother Sr M. Vincenza Minet
Superior General of the Handmaids of the Visitation*

1. I am delighted to address my cordial greeting to you and to the sisters gathered in Villaggio San Francesco and Santa Croce in Acerno, Salerno (Italy), for your Fourth General Chapter. This is a special time of grace for the congregation which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. Some of you have been members of the Institute since its foundation and, having lived through the events that marked the beginnings, you carry deep in your hearts the "*magnificat*" for all the Lord has done. May you share this canticle of praise with the younger sisters, so that the whole Congregation in its communities and activities may live and work with the deep spiritual exultation which marked the joyful mystery of Mary's visit to her elderly cousin, Elizabeth.

With great joy, I join in your common thanksgiving to the Lord for the benefits you have received. I likewise encourage you in your desire to look to the future with prophetic courage, the better to understand the challenges and expectations of the Church and of the world. This is what you intend to do at your Chapter Assembly on the theme: "Our charism in a changing world".

2. Your charism is rooted in the wonderful mystery of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary to St Elizabeth. Each one of you has directed her attention to this episode of the Gospel that is so moving in its simplicity. You intend to be inspired by it constantly, both when you are working with abandoned children suffering from malnutrition and when serving the elderly and the sick, in parishes and in mission countries.

The spiritual riches that flow from this event of Luke's Gospel are truly inexhaustible. The example of the Virgin requires being constantly actualized and joined with the different historical, geographical and cultural needs. In a changing world, the charism does not change but, in order to

operate effectively and bear abundant fruit, needs that "creativity in charity" that I spoke of in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* (cf. n. 50).

3. Being "Handmaids of the Visitation" means imitating every day the Blessed Virgin Mary: after receiving the Annunciation of the Angel she "*arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah*" to be close to Elizabeth, in need of her help, for she was expecting John the Precursor. Be neighbour to those in need: that is the commandment that Christ gave to every disciple, which you have adopted as your ideal and the purpose of your life and community action. God reveals to Mary the miraculous pregnancy of her elderly relative as a sign that nothing is impossible for him. For you the Lord has not failed, nor will he fail, to show the persons to whom you should offer concrete solidarity, so that in you and in them may grow faith and gratitude to his infinite and almighty mercy.

Dear friends, continue to walk in this direction, conscious that in your neighbour in difficulty, it is Christ himself you honour and serve. May you also make it your concern daily to grow in the spirit of fraternal communion. A community in which Christ's love reigns works in joy and harmony, more easily overcoming obstacles and difficulties.

4. Dear Sisters, above all, may you be persons of faith and of untiring prayer. Close union with God, "wrought in us by the Holy Spirit ... opens us, through Christ and in Christ, to contemplation of the Father's face" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 32). What would your institute be without this soul? What would service to your brethren be without the invisible boost of constant prayer? It would all be reduced to mere social assistance or activity, and would lose the power of prophetic witness.

In the mystery of the Visitation, contemplation and action appear merged in a harmonious synthesis. In the ordinary, everyday quality of Mary's service to Elizabeth, we breathe the air of holiness, the daily fulfilment of the divine will in every circumstance.

I hope that each one of you will live and work in each community of the Institute with this lifestyle, which creates an atmosphere conducive to holiness. In Italy, in Poland, in Brazil, in the Philippines, in Kenya, in Madagascar, and wherever Providence wishes to call you, keep intact your charism. May Mary, the Virgin of the Visitation, guide and assist you: every day with her raise your "*magnificat*" to God who is rich in mercy. For my part, I will remember you in prayer, as I wholeheartedly bless you, the work of your Chapter and your entire religious family.

From the Vatican, 8 September 2002.

JOHN PAUL II
