



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE MINISTER GENERAL OF THE ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR CONVENTUAL

To the Most Reverend Father Joachim Giermek

*Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor Conventual*¹. I learned with joy that this Order intends to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the birth of St Joseph of Cupertino, on 17 June 1603, with a series of religious, pastoral and cultural events that all aim at recovering the depth and timeliness of the message of this faithful disciple of the *Poverello* of Assisi. On this special occasion, I am delighted to address my most cordial greeting to you and willingly extend it to the Franciscan community of Osimo and the Friars Minor Conventual throughout the world. I also greet the devotees and the pilgrims who will take part in the solemn celebrations for the Jubilee.² This important occasion is a rare opportunity of grace, offered first of all to the Friars Minor Conventual. They must feel impelled by the saint's example to deepen their religious vocation in order to respond with renewed dedication, as he did in his day, to the great challenges that society creates for the followers of St Francis of Assisi at the dawn of the third millennium. At the same time, this centenary year is a providential opportunity for the whole Christian community to give thanks to the Lord for the abundant fruits of holiness and human wisdom bestowed upon this humble and obedient servant of Christ. St Joseph of Cupertino continues to shine out in our times as a beacon that enlightens the daily path of those who have recourse to his heavenly intercession. Popularly known as "the Flying Saint" on account of his frequent ecstasies and the extraordinary nature of his mystical experiences, he invites the faithful to follow the deepest expectations of the heart; he encourages them to seek the profound meaning of life and, in the last analysis, draws them to encounter God personally, abandoning themselves fully to his will.³ As the Patron of students, St Joseph of Cupertino encourages the world of culture, and, particularly the world of education, to base human knowledge on divine wisdom. Besides, it is on account of his interior docility to the promptings of divine wisdom that this unusual saint can be proposed as a spiritual guide to every category of the faithful. To priests and consecrated persons, to young people and adults, to children and the elderly, to whoever wants to be a disciple of Christ, he continues to point out the priorities that this radical choice involves. The recognition of the primacy of God in our lives, the value of prayer and contemplation, passionate adherence to the Gospel "*sine glossa*", without compromises: these are a few indispensable conditions for being Jesus' credible witnesses, lovingly seek his holy Face. This is what this extraordinary mystic, an exemplary follower of the *Poor Man* of Assisi, did. He burned with tender love for the Lord and lived for the service of his Kingdom. Now from Heaven, he never ceases to protect and support all who, following in his footsteps, want to be converted to God and set out with determination on the path of holiness.⁴ From the spirituality that defines him emerge the typical features of the genuine Franciscan tradition. In love with the mystery of the Incarnation, Joseph of Cupertino would contemplate in ecstasy the Son of God born in

Bethlehem, calling him fondly and confidently "the little Baby Jesus". He expressed externally the joyful love of this mystery by holding close to his chest a wax figure of the Child Jesus and singing and dancing for the divine tenderness so abundantly poured out upon humanity in the grotto of the Nativity. Also touching was St Joseph's participation in the mystery of Christ's Passion. The crucified One was ever present in his mind and heart, in the midst of the sufferings of a life in which he was often misunderstood and hindered. Tears would stream from his eyes at the thought of Jesus dying on the Cross, especially since, as he liked to repeat, it was sin that pierced the immaculate Redeemer with the hammer of ingratitude, selfishness and indifference.⁵ Another important aspect of his spirituality was his love for the Eucharist. The celebration of Mass and the long hours he spent in adoration before the tabernacle were the heart of his life of prayer and contemplation. He considered the Sacrament of the Altar the "bread of angels", a mystery of faith that Jesus left to his Church, the sacrament in which the Son of God made man does not appear to the faithful face-to-face, but heart-to-heart. With this supreme mystery - he affirmed - God has given us all the treasures of his divine omnipotence and has clearly lavished upon us an excess of divine mercy. From daily contact with Jesus in the Eucharist, he drew serenity and peace which he then passed on to everyone he met, recalling that, in this world, we are all pilgrims and wayfarers on our way to eternity.⁶ St Joseph of Cupertino was conspicuous for his simplicity and obedience. Detached from everything, he lived constantly on the move, going from one friary to another as the Superiors commanded, on every occasion abandoning himself into God's hands. An authentic Franciscan, living according to the spirit of the *Poor Man* of Assisi, he was deeply devoted to the Successor of Peter and had a lively sense of the Church, whom he loved with an unconditional love. He felt he was a living and active member of the Church perceived in her intimate reality of mystical Body. He fully adhered to the desire of the Popes of his time, with docility letting himself be accompanied to the places where obedience took him and accepting besides the humiliation and suspicion that the originality of his charisms never failed to arouse. Of course, he could not deny the extraordinary nature of the gifts he had received, but far from any attitude of pride or vanity, he continued to nourish sentiments of humility and truth, attributing all the merit of the good that flourished in his hands to God's free action.⁷ What can be said of his touching devotion as son to the Blessed Virgin? From the days of his youth he learned to stand at the feet of Our Lady of Grace in the shrine at Galatone. He would later pause to contemplate the beloved image of Our Lady of Grottella who accompanied him during his life. Finally, from the friary in Osimo where he spent his last years, he would often turn his gaze to the Basilica of Loreto, for centuries a centre of Marian devotion. For him, Mary was a true mother with whom he experienced the simple, sincere, confident relations of a son. Still today, he repeats to the devout who turn to him: "This is our Protectress, Lady, Patroness, Mother, Spouse and Help".⁸ In St Joseph of Cupertino, who is very dear to the people, there shines forth the wisdom of the little ones and the spirit of the evangelical Beatitudes. Throughout his life he points to genuine joy, even in the midst of fatigue and trials: a joy that comes from on high and is born from his love for God and for his brothers and sisters, the fruit of a long and demanding search for the true good. For this reason it is contagious toward those who come into contact with him. If, because of his intense, burning dedication to Christian asceticism this saint might appear, at a superficial glance, as rude, severe and rigorous, yet he was a man full of joy, affable and cordial with all. Indeed, biographers say that he succeeded in passing on his holy Franciscan joy by his way of praying, enlivened with attractive music and popular songs that involved his listeners and revived their devotion.⁹ All these features bring St Joseph of Cupertino spiritually close to the people of our time. I therefore hope that the observance of the anniversary will be a pleasant and timely opportunity to rediscover the true spirituality of "the Flying Saint". At his school everyone can learn how to pursue the path to "weekday" holiness, that flows from the faithful fulfilment of daily duties. For the religious family of Friars Minor Conventual, may he be a shining model of how to follow the Gospel according to the specific charism of Francis and Clare of Assisi. May he remind the faithful who will take part in the various observances, that all believers

must "put out into the deep", confident that the Lord will help them to respond fully to their own call to holiness. In a word, may the heroic evangelical witness of this fascinating man of God, recognized by the Church and presented once again to the men and women of our time, be for each one a strong appeal to live his/her faith with passion and enthusiasm in the many complex situations of the contemporary world. With these sentiments and good wishes, I gladly impart to you, Most Reverend Minister General, to your confreres around the world and to those who come daily to the Shrine in Osimo, a special Apostolic Blessing which I extend with affection to all who are inspired by the example and teaching of the saint of Cupertino. *From the Vatican, 22 February 2003.* **JOHN PAUL II**

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