



The Holy See

LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE SERVANTS OF MARY, MINISTERS OF THE SICK

Dear Sisters,

I am glad to address a cordial greeting to you, Sisters who represent all the Servants of Mary, Ministers of the Sick. You have been taking part in the work of the XXIII General Chapter which is a sign of the unity of your institute, present in many parts of the world, that enriches the Church with the charism that the Mother Foundress, St Soledad Torres Acosta shared with you more than 150 years ago. It is your task to re-inforce your fidelity to your original spirit and to discern how best to live it today, at the beginning of a new millennium in which the Church feels called in particular to show tangibly "to what length of dedication the Christian community can go in charity towards the poorest" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 49).

In a special way, I greet the Superior General, her councillors and immediate collaborators, and ask for abundant divine blessings for them in their responsibility for guiding the Congregation with clear-sightedness and, as you decided in your Chapter, for accompanying their sisters in their resolve to continue with daring and creativity the way of holiness pointed out by your holy Mother.

In effect, besides being the definite aspiration of every consecrated person, holiness is the first prerequisite for witnessing to the Kingdom of God in the world, and for reminding others of the vocation to which Christians are called (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 39).

2. The charism that distinguishes you, care of the sick in their own homes, is very much in accord with the creativity of charity that belongs to all ecclesial action, while you concretely act with the attitude that every "hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 50).

At your Chapter, you also wanted to highlight the need to be with Mary and like Mary in the world

of suffering. This Marian dimension of your charism, so accurately intuited by your foundress, calls to mind the figure of the Mother of Jesus, who stood upright at the foot of the Cross when almost everyone had fled. This scene can reveal the rich spirit of your mission, since it shows the force of an unyielding faith in Christ and the activity of contemplating his battered face in each of your brothers and sisters, thus transforming your service into a true moment of prayer.

In this regard, last year, on the occasion of anniversaries that were very important for your institute, I prayed that the Virgin Mary might "visit homes with you, in order to show [to the sick] Jesus, the true Saviour and Redeemer of every human being" (*Address to the Servants of Mary, Ministers of the Sick*, 16 February 2001, n. 3; *ORE*, 21 March 2001, p. 7) . I repeat it to you now, recommending that you continue your visits praying the Rosary often while you take care of the sick. In fact, "contemplating the scenes of the Rosary in union with Mary is a means of learning from her to "read" Christ, to discover his secrets and to understand his message" (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, n. 14). What better way of learning "the same sentiments as Christ" (Phil 2,5) than to ask his Mother to watch over her sick children and to deepen the reparational aspect of suffering?

In this way, may the balanced rhythm of the Hail Mary's you say while you contemplate the mysteries of her divine Son, enrich with prayer the time you spend accompanying the sick.

Moreover, it can be a magnificent occasion for them to experience God's special love for them, and sometimes, awakening a feeling of faith and devotion, perhaps dormant or forgotten, they should combine it, as far as they can, with this prayer so loved by the Church and suited to their condition (cf. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, n. 38).

3. To conclude, I would like to put the results of the Chapter and the future of your Congregation in the hands of our Mother in heaven. She, who is the Health of the Sick and the Comforter of the Afflicted, will be the best one to teach you how to carry out your mission and will encourage you, with the example of her unreserved readiness for God's will (cf. Lk 1,38), with joy, generosity and decisiveness to say the daily "yes" of your unconditional gift of self, even amid uncertainties that may arise.

I invoke the intercession of St María Soledad Torres Acosta, whose statue I had the opportunity to bless today, since it has been set up in a niche on the exterior of St Peter's Basilica, and I ask her to expand your institute with new vocations. With these sentiments, I warmly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, and I extend it to all the Servants of Mary, Ministers of the Sick.

From the Vatican, 13 November 2002.

JOHN PAUL II

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