



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR

21 June 1979 Dear Sons, members of the General Chapter of Friars Minor, It gives us great pleasure to grant you this special audience and we greet you wholeheartedly. At the same time we extend fatherly congratulations to the new Minister General John Vaughn and also a friendly greeting to Father Constantine Koser, who after a long term of office has relinquished this heavy responsibility. We thank you because of the joy you bring us through this encounter with you. Your presence calls to mind contacts we have had with the members of the Franciscan Order and it renews for us mentally the remembrance of those steps which we took, as it were, while, following the paths on which Saint Francis left his noble footprints: footprints, we say, of a man who was particularly on fire with love for Christ, of a faithful servant of the Church and of a brotherly friend of men and of all creatures. In this respect we are pleased to recall that when we were Cardinal Archbishop of Krakow, twice on the anniversary day of our priestly ordination we went on pilgrimage to Mount Alvernia where your Seraphic Father received the stigmata. Then when we were elected to the office of Supreme Roman Pontiff, who is, as it were, the vicar of the love of Christ (cf. S. Ambrose, *Expos. Evang. sec. Luc.*, X, 175; PL 15, 1848), at the very beginning of that Pontificate and indeed on the fifth day of November last year, we went to Assisi to the tomb of Saint Francis to ask him to help us to understand the men of our times in accordance with the concern of the Saviour's heart. Having recalled these events in our life, we ask you to let sink deeply into your minds and hearts the words with which our first encyclical letter begins: "The Redeemer of man, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history". The implication of these words must be made known to you; namely your Order must regain the vitality it had at the beginning to make it suitable to make Christ known to the world, and following the example of your Seraphic Father to give that witness of love for the Church which he gave in an outstanding way. To discover that former vitality you are led, we think rightly, to the very place where the General Chapter is being held. We are speaking of the "convent" of Saint Mary of the Angels, where, as Saint Bonaventure relates, your illustrious father "began in a humble way, made progress in virtue, and died happily" (*Legenda Maior*, c. II, n.8: *Analecta Franciscana*, X, Ad Claras Aquas 1926, p. 566). For it was there that he carried out in a remarkable way that penance he had planned for himself from the beginning of his life of dedication to God. But to achieve any kind of spiritual renewal it is necessary to begin with penance, which is the same as *metanoia*, that is, a change of heart. Certainly on this condition the sons of Saint Francis will fulfil their vocation. On this fidelity to your original way of life depends also the effectiveness of the role you will play in the salvific work of the Church in so far as you devote yourselves and your works to the ministry of the gospel whilst adhering strictly to the magisterium of the Church. Therefore accept the fatherly exhortation which the Roman Pontiff gives you today. Love the Church as Saint Francis loved it. Love it more than yourselves. Give up, if necessary, the ways of thinking and living,

which, if suited to the past, are now less appropriate to promote the vitality of the Church and to extend the horizons of its charity. Whilst renewing this ecclesial vocation of yours you must comply with the will of the Seraphic Father who sent his brethren to all parts of the world to preach peace and penance to men for the remission of sins (cf. Thomas a Celano, *Vita I*, p. I, c. XII, n. 29: *Analecta Franciscana* mem., p. 24). Make contact with men in the very conditions of their daily lives. Assist and cultivate that divine seed which is in them (cf. 1 Jn. 3:9), so that they may come to know the incarnate Son of God and accept him and become children of God. No one, as is well known, understood the sacredness of creation as did Saint Francis, who—to use the words of our venerated Predecessor [Paul VI](#)—after he had left all things for Christ, through "lady poverty" experienced, so to say, something of that initial joy when the whole world came forth from the hands of the Creator. In this complete renunciation of things, when he was already almost blind, he was able to sing the immortal Canticle of Creatures, and likewise the praises of our brother Sun; the praises of the things in the whole of nature which had become for him a clear and pure reflection of the divine glory" (Apostolic Exhortation [Gaudete in Domino](#), IV: AAS 67, [1975] 307). Therefore it is also part of your vocation to teach men to relate the things of this world to the work of salvation, and while led by a certain natural inclination they dwell upon these things, to lead them at the same time to a hope which transcends all created things. Dear Franciscans! Since you have been constituted as religious in the very depth of your Christian conscience, as it were (cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation [Evangelica Testificatio](#), 19: AAS, 63 [1971] 508), we have addressed these words to you to strengthen you, to stimulate you, and to invite you to a daily greater keenness such as is proper that you may be co-operators of the successor of Blessed Peter "upon whom was imposed in a special way the great duty of spreading the Christian name" (Dogm. Const. [Lumen Gentium](#), 23). May the holy Mother of God guard and protect you! For she has a special place in your theological tradition, especially regarding the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. Through this mystery she became the most perfect human type of the Church, which Christ, its founder, wanted to be "having no spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish" (cf. Eph. 5:27). Imitate Mary, who was entirely devoted to the will of God. Listen to her who gives you this exhortation concerning her Son: "Whatsoever he shall say to you, do it" (Jn 2:5). Finally to strengthen you always to respond zealously to your noble Franciscan vocation, with the loving sentiments of a father we impart to you here present and to your entire religious family the Apostolic Blessing. © Copyright 1979 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana