



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR**

Tuesday, 16 December 1997

Dear Friars Minor,

1. I am pleased to welcome you today and to each one of you I extend a cordial greeting with the familiar words of St Francis: "May the Lord give you peace". I thank you for your visit: you have come to renew those bonds of deep communion with the Successor of Peter that the Seraphic Father in his Rule wished to make the distinctive mark of your order.

I especially greet the newly elected Minister General, Fr Giacomo Bini, and I extend to him my best wishes for the difficult task that has been entrusted to him. My thoughts go likewise to Fr Hermann Schalück, who carried out his mandate at the head of the order with a spirit of service.

Your presence this morning offers me the welcome opportunity to express to all your confrères throughout the world my gratitude for their generous and fruitful commitment of fidelity to Christ and of active evangelization. Your apostolic work, which is so appreciated, is directed in various ways to the care especially of the poor and less fortunate, following in the footsteps of your holy founder.

2. Last May you held your General Chapter at the Shrine of the Porziuncola, a place so dear to Francis, where he was enlightened as to his vocation and which saw the beginning of his fruitful spiritual and missionary work that marked a great renewal in the Church and society of the time. Gathering there for an act of fundamental importance in the life of a religious institute has a special significance inasmuch as it expresses your desire to return to the roots of your own charism. The Porziuncola, that sacred place known throughout the world, returned to the news because of the tragic events of the recent earthquake, which devastated Umbria and the Marches, leaving the people and structures with deep wounds yet to be healed.

Speaking of the Porziuncola, how could we not remember the famous invitation addressed there to St Francis: "Go and repair my Church"? Attentive to the signs of the times, you wish to seize every occasion to intensify the enthusiasm and generosity of your service to the Church with great and unaltered fidelity to the spirit of your origins. By accepting the promptings of the Lord's Spirit, you wish to open yourselves, in dynamic continuity with your authentic tradition, to the expectations and challenges of the present, to co-operate in guiding people to meet the Lord who comes.

If the earthquakes that hit material structures are serious, other phenomena, perhaps even more worrisome, should not be overlooked; these are phenomena that disturb people's lives and emphasize the absence and emptiness of humanity and of their sense of God. I am referring to the lack of respect for human dignity and for the inviolability of human life, to religious indifference and practical atheism, which cause the idea of God to be removed from the horizon of life, opening the way to a dangerous emptiness of values and ideals.

If, on the one hand, the challenges of our time cause us to look with anxiety at the future, on the other, they strongly summon the community of believers to accept them and to address them with urgency. Time is short, the Advent liturgy warns us, and it is necessary to prepare the way of the Lord who comes. This spirit, characteristic of the liturgical season we are celebrating, must animate all the activity of every religious institute.

My deepest wish is that it should increasingly permeate your religious family, which is called to bring the Gospel of joy and love to the people of our time. Thus, the mission that awaits you, in view of the third millennium, is to start again from your origins, in order to intensify your concern for your brothers and sisters by promoting updated pastoral work in accordance with your charism. At the heart of this difficult apostolic renewal is attentiveness to God in the contemplative style of life that was typical of St Francis. He loved to say that "the preacher must first draw from the depth of prayer what he will then put into his sermons". While wishing you to follow faithfully in the steps of your Seraphic Father, I invoke on you and on the whole order a renewed outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so that they may sustain and guide you in your service to Christ and the Church.

I wish you all a holy Christmas, with the hope of a new year that is full of peace and joy. With these sentiments, I bless you all.

© Copyright 1997 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana