



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SISTERS OF St ELIZABETH
ON OCCASION OF THEIR 20th GENERAL CHAPTER***

Saturday, 14 November 1998

Dear Sisters,

1. My welcome and cordial gratitude to you all for this visit by which you have wanted to show your deep and generous fidelity to the person and magisterium of the Successor of Peter during your 20th General Chapter. I would like to extend a special greeting to Mother Margarita Wisniewska, to whom I also offer my congratulations on her re-election as Superior General: with the help of God may she continue to lead her sisters with skill and wisdom to an ever more intense fidelity to their original charism and to new goals of generous service to the poorest.

In addition to the participants in the Chapter, I also extend my greeting to the entire religious family of the Sisters of St Elizabeth, which in many nations of the world and with admirable dedication are a special sign of God's tenderness for our sick and needy brethren, offering concrete witness of the mystery of the Church, virgin, bride and mother. I also wish to encourage the members of the Apostolic Community of St Elizabeth, who, by living intensely their baptismal consecration, share the congregation's charism and mission, thus showing God's merciful love by their lives and their work.

Your congregation was born of the faith and hearts of four women from the Polish town of Nysa, which then belonged to Germany. In 1842, seeing the needs of the most indigent, they felt called to give themselves completely to Christ, to spend all their energies in the service of his kingdom of love.

In pursuing their goal, they turned to the icon of the Good Samaritan, placing themselves under the special protection of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and taking as their model a woman full of love for God and for the needy of her time, St Elizabeth of Hungary, whom they wished to be the special patroness of the new institute.

2. Dear sisters, the teachings and examples of the saints encourage the faithful to follow the way of Gospel perfection, in order to proclaim the kingdom of God with enthusiasm and to witness to the Gospel by a life that is given totally to the Lord. For this reason, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* I recalled that “institutes of consecrated life are invited courageously to propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today’s world. This invitation is first of all a call to perseverance on the path of holiness in the midst of the material and spiritual difficulties of daily life. But it is also a call to pursue competence in personal work and to develop a dynamic fidelity to their mission, adapting forms, if need be, to new situations and different needs, in complete openness to God’s inspiration and to the Church’s discernment. But all must be fully convinced that the quest for ever greater conformity to the Lord is the guarantee of any renewal which seeks to remain faithful to an institute’s original inspiration” (n. 37).

You too, sustained by the ever vivid memory of your foundresses, have listened during your Chapter to the Holy Spirit, to interpret wisely the signs of the times and to respond with creative fidelity to the challenges you face in this last part of the century and the millennium.

Conscious that religious life “indisputably belongs to the life and holiness of the Church” (*ibid.*, n. 29) and “proclaims and in a certain way anticipates the future age” (*ibid.*, n. 32), you have undertaken a process of courageous renewal to live more intensely your motherhood “according to the Spirit” (cf. Rom 8:4) in the care of the poor, the sick and the marginalized, in the Christian education of children and young people, and in the religious formation of adults (cf. Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, n. 21).

3. “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). In these words of the Lord you have identified the goal and programme of your life as consecrated women and the motive for the renewal of your community life and apostolic commitment.

In fact, the possibility of a renewed fidelity to your original charism is based first of all on attentive and humble listening to the Lord and on the ability to see in your brothers and sisters the face of Jesus. In this way you serve the kingdom of God.

During the work of your Chapter you have rightly emphasized a deeper understanding of the revealed Word, so that it may illumine and guide your community life and enrich it with contemplation, generous sacrifice, joyous sharing and mutual love.

Your daily contact with the rapid and profound changes taking place in today’s society and with a culture that, although secularized, is nonetheless sensitive to the witness of authentic believers, encourages you in particular to develop the missionary dimension already inherent in your charism, and to ask yourselves how to meet these social and religious challenges.

The desire for greater fidelity to the charism of your foundresses and for ardent missionary commitment will prompt you to strive for an ever more generous response to the grace of your vocation. This presupposes a careful formation, extended to all the stages of religious life, to prepare mature and consistent people who know how to bring the message

of Christ to the modern physical and spiritual forms of poverty, to heal wounds and to spread hope. For the sick, the elderly, the young and all who are afflicted by the countless forms of marginalization present even in the most advanced countries, may your communities be places of welcome and houses of mercy.

4. Dear sisters, I entrust each of you and your entire religious family to the maternal protection of the Blessed Virgin, and I hope that your chapter will be able to revive on the threshold of a new millennium the zeal and faith of your foundresses and the charitable commitment of your heavenly patroness.

With these wishes, I invoke heavenly rewards upon you, upon your daily service and on your good plans as well as upon the lay persons who share your charism and mission, and upon all those whom you will meet on your way, as I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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