



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE**

*Thursday, 24 September 1998*

1. I am pleased to welcome you at the end of your 33rd General Chapter, whose central theme was *evangelization of the poor on the threshold of the third millennium*. I congratulate Fr Wilhelm Steckling, the new Superior General, and his Council, who together are called to lead the *Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate* into this new phase, in order to strengthen their unity, to develop constantly their pastoral character and take part ever more effectively in the Church's mission.

With you all, I give thanks to the Lord for the work accomplished by the Oblates. Your presence on every continent, and particularly in distant lands, brings you into contact with men and women of different cultures and traditions; this is the sign of the Church's universality and of her concern for all peoples. To stay close to people, particularly the poor whose numbers continue to increase, you have wished to reorganize your presence in the various Provinces by sending new communities to Asia, Latin America, Africa, as well as to the great Canadian North. You are also concerned with the new areas of mission, especially the communications media and confident dialogue with the people of today, in order to establish an ever more fraternal society and an era of justice and peace. You are making courageous efforts to meet new, urgent pastoral, apostolic and missionary needs, and to undertake the necessary inculturation, a patient process which, while requiring you to listen to people, "must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 52). The Church appreciates your willingness and concern to answer the Lord's call wherever you are sent and to put yourselves at the service of the local Churches, despite your limited means and the decreasing number of those belonging to your institute. I am sure that the missionary zeal of your General Assembly will bear many fruits and give new strength to your institute.

2. As you know, proclaiming the Gospel requires you to draw strength, courage and hope from a life of prayer, especially from mental prayer by which God communicates many spiritual graces, from the *Liturgy of the Hours*, the prayer which gives each person a share in the praise of the universal Church and thus in her mission, as well as from meditation on Scripture and from the Eucharist in which Christ teaches his disciples and gives himself as food for their apostolic

journey. Daily discipline, the offering of oneself to God, and community life are authentic proofs of intense love and are the first way to proclaim the Gospel. This is how to imitate Christ, enabling you to say: "Come and see" (Jn 1:39) and to open people's hearts to receiving the word of God. Indeed, the Lord's faithful will be recognized by their contemporaries by their love for one another and will reveal the face of the risen One (1 Jn 4:11). In today's world more than ever, priests and religious must live in close union with their Teacher, striving to become saints as your Rule requires, so that you will be docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and respond better to the world's appeal. The life of prayer does not turn people away: on the contrary, it helps them to perceive more deeply their essential needs which only Christ can reveal to us, he who became man to reunite his brethren and to save all humanity.

3. Like many institutes, you wish to involve lay people in your activities and your spirituality. This generous collaboration is very valuable to the mission and gives each person the opportunity to develop his spiritual life according to the original intention of Eugène de Mazenod, who was "marked by a heroic degree of faith, hope and apostolic charity", as I recalled at his canonization. Continue to rely on his spirituality and missionary zeal to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth!

4. You are asking yourselves about your institute's decreasing numbers. This is a source of suffering and a trial which must in no way weaken the missionary zeal of the Oblates. On the contrary, may it be an opportunity to redouble your efforts to offer your ideal to young people on every continent, many of whom are generous and long to serve Christ and his Church!

As I entrust you to the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin and St Eugène de Mazenod, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, to all the members of your institute and to all who support you.

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