



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE

Thursday, 15 June 2000

Dear Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate!

1. I am pleased to welcome you and to thank you for this visit which you desired to express your sentiments of filial communion to the Successor of Peter on the occasion of your first General Chapter. I greet your Superior General, Sr Maria Francesca Perillo, and with her Fr Stefano Maria Manelli and Fr Gabriele Maria Pellettieri, the founders of your institute. I also greet each of you. Your presence gives me the welcome opportunity to extend an affectionate greeting to all your sisters in various parts of the world, where they are active in evangelizing and assisting people suffering various forms of poverty.

Your Chapter is being held in the Great Jubilee year. It is a happy coincidence which will certainly help you to reflect on your mission with special intensity, following the teachings of St Francis of Assisi and of someone who gave effective expression to his spirit in our time, St Maximilian Mary Kolbe. His heroic witness to the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience was crowned with martyrdom, the supreme sacrifice of his life for love of Christ and of his brethren.

Keeping your gaze fixed on Christ, supported by the help of St Francis and St Maximilian, you will be able to fulfil your mission in the Church and the world.

2. St Maximilian Kolbe's entire life was inspired by the Immaculate. Your institute is dedicated to her and, in addition to the three traditional religious vows, includes a "Marian" vow by which each religious consecrates herself totally to Mary for the coming of Christ's kingdom in the world. May contemplation of the marvels that the heavenly Father worked in the humble girl of Nazareth always guide your consecrated life on the demanding path of sanctification, in the footsteps of the One who, dedicated to serving God without reserve, became our Mother, Mother of the Church and of all humanity.

Imitate Mary's loving concern in your service to others, always seeking to be diligent in your work and zealous in your apostolate. May this be the spirit of your activity in the Church; may this be the hallmark of your evangelizing and missionary work, as you keep hearts attentive to the needs of every human being. As consecrated persons and, in a special way, as Franciscan Missionaries of the Immaculate, you are called to be, by joyful fidelity to your Rule, "signs of God's tender love towards the human race and to be special witnesses to the mystery of the Church, Virgin, Bride and Mother" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 57).

For this reason, too, may your model be Mary, who promptly responded to the divine plan: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1: 38). Her "*fiat*" was the driving force of her mission. In this way your "*fiat*" to God will be the secret to your mission's success. To be effective Gospel witnesses, especially among the poor and those in difficulty, it is indispensable for you to abandon yourselves totally to the Lord's hands and to keep your hearts open to his divine plans.

3. To those visiting the "City of the Immaculate" who were amazed at the works accomplished, St Maximilian Kolbe, pointing to the Blessed Sacrament, explained: "The whole reality of Niepokalanów depends on this". He addressed the Eucharistic Jesus with words of deep faith: "Your Blood flows in my blood; your soul, O God incarnate, penetrates my soul, strengthening and nourishing it". This was the secret of his holiness. The graces which sustain missionaries in their daily work of evangelization radiate from the Eucharist. If your apostolate is to bear the good fruits you desire, be nourished by this inexhaustible source of love through intense prayer and interior life.

I was pleased to learn that your institute has no lack of vocations. I thank the Lord with you for this and invite you to continue to propose the radicalness of your Gospel witness to everyone you meet. Take great care of the human and spiritual formation of those who aspire to the consecrated life.

Conscious that Christians are "in the world ... but not of the world" (cf. *Jn* 17: 13-16), be the good yeast which leavens the whole dough (cf. *Gal* 5: 9); be the salt that gives taste and the light that shines (cf. *Mt* 5: 13-14). Never lose sight of the example of the Incarnate Word who out of love became a servant and gave his life for us. Never tire of walking in his footsteps. Stand at the foot of the Cross with Mary, the Immaculate Virgin to whom your religious family is consecrated!

For my part I assure you of a remembrance in my prayer, as I cordially impart a special Blessing to you and extend it to my venerable Brother, Cardinal Augustin Mayer, who will preside at your Chapter, as well as to all your sisters and to everyone who belongs to your spiritual family.

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