



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE STIGMATINE BROTHERS

Saturday, 12 February 2000

Dear Stigmatine Brothers,

1. I joyfully welcome you in the spiritual and ecclesial context of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, on the occasion of the 34th General Chapter of your congregation. Together with the pilgrims coming to Rome from all over the world, you too have gathered here from four continents, representing over 400 confrères, to discern what the Spirit is asking today, at the dawn of the third millennium, of the sons of St Gaspare Bertoni. I myself had the joy of celebrating the canonization of your founder on the Solemnity of All Saints in 1989. He had a special devotion to the Successor of Peter and the Apostolic See, and your visit today is meant as a new sign of this.

2. In his Constitutions, the founder defined the members of the congregation as "*missionarii apostolici in obsequium episcoporum*". You are therefore persons who, with all your strength and with the particular grace of your vocation, wish to cooperate in carrying out the apostolic mission. In the spirit and footsteps of your founder, you work in parish ministry, with special attention to young people; you devote yourselves to the preaching and formation of the clergy; and you are involved in the mission *ad gentes* in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Some of you have been called to episcopal service, especially in Brazil; just over a month ago I consecrated Fr Giuseppe Pasotto, Apostolic Administrator of the Caucasus, a Bishop. This fact, which testifies to the fidelity and generosity of the Stigmatines, is for me a reason for gratitude.

With you I pray the "Lord of the harvest" to grant numerous and good vocations to your religious family, in order to support the work you have begun, but also to enable you to start new ones, wherever the mission of the Redeemer will spur the steps of your congregation's members.

3. As the central theme of your Chapter you have chosen that of *fraternal sharing within the religious community*, in order to bear witness to God's love in the world. This is a characteristic

value of consecrated life, greatly emphasized during the Synod Assembly of 1995 and fully acknowledged in the Apostolic Exhortation that followed it. To reflect and work with this vision is more necessary than ever today, to show the men and women of our time, who are influenced by a widespread individualistic mentality, "how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity" (Ps 133: 1), so that in this way everyone may recognize that you are disciples of Christ (cf. *Jn* 13: 35).

The community life of consecrated persons is an eloquent sign of ecclesial communion, strengthened especially by the common experience of fraternal sharing: *signum fraternitatis* (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, n. 42). This fraternity takes many concrete forms according to the variety of charisms and characteristics of the institute. However, the love spread among the different members by the same Holy Spirit is one.

4. This Holy Year, which the Church sees as a great hymn to the Holy Trinity, is a most appropriate time to create space for the *contemplative dimension* of the consecrated life, so that, by absorbing the vital fluid that flows from its *theological roots*, it may be inwardly renewed and strengthened by it. Gospel brotherhood is in fact a radiance of Trinitarian communion and must be constantly nourished by it through the Word of God, the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation and daily prayer.

In this regard your founder wrote: "Indeed, nothing draws the love of true charity to a person more than recognizing his particular virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit, regarding him as the image of God portrayed with the most beautiful colours of grace: if everyone therefore strives to grow in these virtues and in these gifts and to consider them often in others, if they will love to regard in their hearts these others as superior to themselves, enjoy the spiritual gifts that they see in them and give thanks for them to God: mutual charity will grow among them in a wonderful way" (*Const.* 223).

5. Sharing is not limited to the fraternal life of the community, but *is extended to its ministry by involving the laity* and to the level of local ecclesial structures. For this reason you must tirelessly renew your commitment to brotherhood and conversion, in the comforting certainty that the Lord is present wherever we sincerely try to live according to his commandment of love.

Your assembly also suggested practical guidelines for deepening the exercise of spiritual and apostolic sharing among your confrères of every age. This is in fact an indispensable support for the *distinctive apostolic mission of your congregation*, that is, of serving the Church under the Bishops' direction. To help each other in communion, so to speak, by fostering the flow of divine love poured into the hearts of each one by the Holy Spirit is the primary condition for fulfilling the apostolic mission, which is often "arduous and difficult" and "exposed to dangers", a mission that "does not depend on human effort, but on the grace of the Holy Spirit". In this way, "he who inspired and began the work, will himself bring it to completion" (*Const.* 185).

Making my own the well-known and beloved words of your revered founder, I pray the Lord, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, to make the effort you have made in these days of common work bear fruit, and I sincerely bless you and all your confrères.

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