



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE 180th GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE ORDER OF ST. AUGUSTINE (OSA)**

Friday 7 September 2001

Reverend Prior General, Fathers of the Augustinian Order!

1. I welcome you with joy, on the occasion of your General Chapter. I especially greet the Prior General and thank him for having expressed the kind sentiments of all present. I greet each of you, Chapter Fathers, and extend my warm thoughts to the entire Order of St Augustine, who are spiritually gathered around your Assembly in these days. This meeting is of singular importance for you, because it occurs at the beginning of a new century and a new millennium, while the memory of the Great Jubilee is still fresh. This event has left an indelible mark on the life and history of the Church and of the world.

All through the Holy Year we were given to experience Christ, "the same yesterday, today and forever" (*Heb* 13,8), more intimately, or in the words of St Augustine, to us "more interior than our own interiority" (*Confes.* 3,11). It has been a year of intense contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation, in which there is an extraordinary "dialogue of love" between God and humanity. St Augustine commenting on it writes: "He who was God became man, taking on what he was not, without losing what he was; and in this way God became man. In this mystery you find help for your weakness and in Him you find all that you need to reach your perfection. Christ lifts you up in virtue of his humanity; he guides you in virtue of his human divinity and he leads you to his divinity" (*Comment on the Gospel of John*, 23,6).

2. God came to the aid of the radical weakness of man, who is aware of his interior restlessness. This restlessness stems from his reaching towards, at times unconsciously, something that transcends him. St Augustine met God through these paths of existential restlessness; the study of the Word of God and prayer were his travelling companions.

Augustine's experience is similar to that of many people today. For this reason, Augustinian Fathers, with modern forms of pastoral service, you can help them to discover the transcendent meaning of life. You should be wise companions for them to guide them towards a faith both more personal and also more communitarian for it is the Church who keeps alive the memory of Christ. St Augustine wrote: "The Church speaks in Christ and Christ speaks in the Church; the body speaks in the Head and the Head speaks in the body" (*Comment on Psalm 30,2; 4*).

Dear spiritual sons of St Augustine! Fulfil this important missionary service in the Church, drawing from the inexhaustible treasures of your Great Teacher suggestions and proposals for a renewed apostolic action. Continue your reflections on these subjects, which you began to consider at the Intermediate General Chapter of 1998, celebrated at Villanova University in the United States. Wisely, you are looking at revising your Constitutions and at the juridical and organizational reforms of the Order which should bring about a sharper communication of the Augustinian charism. However, your most important task is to preserve, unaltered and living, the heritage and the message of the life and doctrine of St Augustine, in which humanity in its quest for truth, happiness and love in every age can recognize itself.

3. St Augustine, so deeply familiar with the human heart, knows that in the depths of a person's restlessness there is God himself, the "*beauty so ancient and so new*" (*Confes.* 10,27,38). The Lord makes himself present through various signs and in many ways, coming to meet his creature who is thirsting for transcendence and interiority. You, dear Augustinian fathers, are the "teachers of interiority" at the service of people of the third millennium who are searching for Christ. He cannot be reached by a superficial path, but by the path of interiority. It is always Augustine who reminds us that only drawing close to one's own interior centre of gravity makes possible contact with the Truth that reigns in the spirit (cf. *De Magistro* [The Teacher] 11,38).

To succeed in reaching this haven, starting point and goal, as St Augustine noted in the Confessions (cf. 1,1,1), a work of immersion in ourselves is necessary, of freedom from being conditioned by the exterior world, of attentive and humble listening to the voice of conscience. Here there is a vast pastoral field which is very well adapted to your charism.

I would like to repeat the words of my venerable predecessor, Pope Paul VI, addressed to you at a meeting similar to today's: "We like to remember still - he writes - an element in which we can recognize a singular trait, or almost, the genius of the Augustinian Order. It is the capacity to carry out the intellectual apostolate.... You have available the priceless doctrinal patrimony of the Saint, you have before you an uninterrupted tradition of study, you have an agile and modern instrument, the Patristic Institute "*Augustinianum*", and so you cannot renounce being actively present in the religious-cultural field" (*Letter to the Prior General O.S.A.*, on the occasion of the General Chapter, 14 September 1977).

4. What an abundant harvest the Lord entrusts to you! Although fulfilling this task requires an

adequate intellectual and pastoral formation, it is essential to tend to holiness, to be in love with God and his eternal plan of salvation.

Your Order has known a long list of saints, down the ages. In recent years I have had the joy of adding others. Is this not a sign of spiritual vitality and an encouragement to continue in their footsteps. May the witness of faith and charity of your brother, Mons. Anselmo Polanco, Bishop of Teruel, assassinated in the turbulent days of the Spanish War, in the heart of the 20th century, be an example for you. Faithful to his episcopal programme, he handed himself over with joy for the souls of his faithful (cf. II *Cor* 12,15).

I also think of the Mexican Father Elias del Socorro Nieves, killed out of hatred for the faith in 1927 and elevated to the glories of the altar on 12 October 1997, and of the Augustinian nun, Mother Maria Teresa Fasce, from Cascia, one of the places that is most evocative of your spirituality, linked to the memory of St Rita, a witness of unlimited forgiveness and heroic acceptance of suffering.

Looking at such shining models, upheld by their intercession, go towards the future with confidence! Put out into the deep! (cf. *Lk* 5,4).

I repeat to you what some years ago I wrote to all consecrated persons: "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also *a great history still to be accomplished!*

Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 110). In these days of work may the Lord inspire you, with the strength of his Spirit, and may Mary, Mother of Good Counsel, illumine and sustain you in every important choice and decision. With these wishes, I gladly impart to you, Reverend Father General, to the Chapter members and to all the members of the Augustinian Order a special Apostolic Blessing.