



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE INSTITUTES OF THE MARIST FAMILY

Monday 17 September 2001

To the Men and Women

Religious of the Institutes of the Marist Family

1. It is with joy that I greet all the representatives of the Marist Family on this happy occasion of the General Chapters of your four institutes taking place at the same time, which also allows your joint visit to the Successor of Peter. May we be permitted to see this as a sign of the Spirit and a call to you to let yourselves be led on ways of even greater communion and closer collaboration! I thank Fr Joaquin Fernández, Superior General of the Society of Mary for his cordial words that reflect the spirit in which you are living your chapters, your deep rootedness in Mary and your concern for the missions.
2. You have chosen consecrated life in the Church, following Mary in fidelity both to your founders' intuitions and to the charism of your institutes. Those who have gone before you dedicated themselves to evangelization in parishes, to the education of youth and in promoting the cause of women. They then generously engaged the whole Marist Family in proclaiming the Gospel to the peoples of Western Oceania, marking this ministry with their imprint: education to Christian fervour and care for local vocations. Today the Church welcomes with gratitude the missionary work that has been accomplished and the gifts of God's grace manifested in the life of your institutes. The Church has acknowledged these gifts in a special way as the fruits of holiness in St Peter Chanel and St Marcellin Champagnat.
3. Today yours is the call to make the presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary visible in the life of the Church and in the life of men and women in an original and specific way and, for this, to develop a Marian attitude. Such an attitude is distinguished by a joyful availability to the calls of the Holy Spirit, by an unshakeable confidence in the Word of the Lord; by spiritual growth in relation to the

various mysteries of Christ's life and by a motherly attentiveness to the needs and sufferings of people, especially of those who are the least. "*A filial relation with Mary constitutes the privileged way of faithfulness to the call received and a very effective help to grow in one's response and to live fully one's vocation*" (*Vita Consecrata*, n. 28). It is, thus, in turning to Mary with fidelity and boldness and in letting her guide you to "do whatever he tells you" (cf. Jn 2,5) that you will find new ways of evangelizing in our times.

4. As she set out in haste toward the hill country of Judea to visit her cousin Elizabeth, does Mary not teach us spiritual freedom! How important it is, actually, not to let yourselves be caught up in dealing solely with the heritage of the past, but to discern what is appropriate to let go in a spirit of poverty, and especially with this Gospel freedom that makes us available to the calls of the Spirit.

When facing a multitude of requests, in effect, one needs true freedom to discern which ones are urgent. "Put out into the deep!". This invitation of Jesus to Peter He extends to us "to go forward in hope" along the byways of the world, sure that "the Blessed Virgin Mary accompanies us on this path" (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 58).

5. Mary gave herself totally to the Lord, placing all her trust in the word of God. How she would like to teach you to dwell in the power of this Word and to choose, like the other Mary, the better part (cf. Lk 10,42). In today's world the disciples of Christ can easily be dispersed, because the abundance of material goods can tear them away from what is essential and because pastoral needs are many. As I recently wrote to the whole Church, we need to contemplate the face of Christ (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, II), to pursue ever more deeply the mystery of his person since he is the true font from which we draw the love we would like to give. Do not let this essential bond of consecration to Christ come undone! Choose rather to follow the Lord humbly, in Mary's discreet way! Work with her to bring your lives into union with the Spirit since, as St Francis de Sales reminds us, "one of the necessary conditions for receiving the Holy Spirit will be to be with Mary" (*Sermon I for Pentecost*), and allow him to configure you ever more to Christ! Then your life and your mission will find their deep meaning and will bear fruit for the men and women of today!

6. Keep the missionary tradition of your family alive! Do this with Mary, for she leads you to be particularly attentive to the distress of the people of our times, of those who in our modern societies are deprived of dignity, recognition and love.

The Church has special need of you in an area essential for the Marist Family: the education of children and young people. This missionary priority is rooted in the spirit of Mary, mother and teacher of Jesus at Nazareth, and later in the first Christian community. The world of education is difficult and demanding, ceaselessly needing educators to be adaptable to the young and to their new expectations. Do not let yourselves become discouraged by the difficulties of the moment, such as a person's age which seemingly creates a distance between you and the young, or the lack of means or availability of labourers to go and work in the vineyard! Look at the young,

instead, with the eyes of the Good Shepherd, as he looked upon the crowds that seemed like sheep without a shepherd (cf. Mt 9,36), and also as a field growing ripe for the harvest and which will bear fruit at the desired time! (cf. Jn 4,35-38). Likewise form lay people to work with you so that they will live that charism which gives you life. By your existence, furthermore, you are called to bring young people to discover the joy there is in following Christ in the consecrated life. Do not be afraid to invite young people in search of truth to this way of life!

7. The general chapters you are living confirm the value of fidelity to your founding spirit as well as its necessary renewal, conserving and enriching the institutes' spiritual legacy. May these chapters help you to find new signs of communion among your four institutes, to strengthen a collaboration which will bring forth fruit for the faithful accomplishment of your mission! May the Blessed Virgin Mary guide you on these paths of encountering one another!

8. It is with these sentiments that I am happy to greet you and to greet, through you, the members of the great Marist Family spread out around the world in various apostolates. I greet especially, and with gratitude, your four superiors general: Fr Joaquin Fernández, Bro. Benito Arbués, Sr Gail Reneker and Sr Patricia Stowers, who have exercised in the course of these past years the difficult service of authority in your institutes. I also extend my best wishes to their successors who will be elected soon so that, following Mary's example, they can lead the Marist Family with daring and with fidelity along the paths of the new millennium!

Entrusting you to Our Lady of Fourvière, who presided over the birth of your institutes, I am happy to grant you, and the whole Marist Family, a special Apostolic Blessing.