



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS SERVANTS
OF THE SICK OF ST CAMILLUS**

*To Reverend Mother Sr Tomasina Gheduzzi
Superior General of the Congregation of the
Sisters Servants of the Sick of St Camillus*

1. On the occasion of the General Chapter for which you and the delegates are meeting in these days, I am delighted to send a greeting to each of you, with the assurance of my spiritual closeness.

You come from different countries in Europe, Latin America, Africa and South-East Asia: through each one of you, I would like to greet all your sisters and the ecclesial communities in which you are at the service of the sick and the suffering.

The Chapter is a suitable occasion on which to pray and reflect upon the issues that challenge the Church and the world at this special historical moment. It is a chance for you to contemplate more deeply the charism that distinguishes you and to adapt it to current needs.

Thinking of you, I immediately recall 6 May 1995, when I had the joy of beatifying your foundress, Mother Maria Domenica Brun Barbantini. With deep pleasure I discovered that the event of grace was for the whole Congregation reason for renewed inspiration that impelled you to become more familiar with your charism and your spirituality, in order to draw from their roots a genuine nourishment so that your daily life and work might benefit from its vigour and light.

2. At this point, it is easier to understand the theme you have chosen for your 32nd General Chapter: *"Towards a new Rule of life"*. Your new aim is not that of changing your original orientation, but, on the contrary, it is the outcome of exacting and enthusiastic research into your sources, a result that, if possible, seeks to be more faithful to your roots, to the gift that the Lord

entrusted to Bl. Maria Domenica and her companions for the good of the Church and of humanity.

From the small group of women who, with Maria Domenica, wanted to call themselves "oblato nurses" and, thanks to the discernment and encouragement of the Pastors of the Church, an institute arose from the small group of women that today is present in nine countries on three continents.

The Holy Spirit, who always "draws" from the inexhaustible riches of Christ to distribute in the Church new gifts of light and grace (cf. Jn 16,14), planted in the heart and life of the foundress a special vocation for serving the sick, in imitation of Christ, and in continuation of his ministry, who bent over every human illness to cure it with his divine power (cf. Lk 10,30-35; Mt 4,23). In his overflowing mercy, the Son of God made himself close to us by becoming himself the "suffering servant" for our healing. For this reason, in the least of our brothers in difficulty, he is present and waits for us to open our hearts to him. If we offer him the "little" that we are and have, we receive in return the "all" that he is.

3. As the Blessed Foundress wrote in the Rule, the Sisters must act in this spirit: they "will serve our Lord in the person of the poor sick with generosity and purity of intention, ever ready to risk their own lives out of love for Jesus who died on the Cross for us" (I, 11). To be able to be faithful to this vocation, it is indispensable to nourish one's personal life with prayer and, especially, with devout participation in the Holy Eucharist, in which, every day, Jesus makes sacramentally present the saving miracle of his passion, death and resurrection. By remaining closely united and configured to him, you will be his hands, his eyes and his heart, for multitudes of our brothers and sisters, after the shining example of St Camillus of Lellis.

May witnessing to (divine) charity be the constant goal of your congregation, dear sisters, a charity that knows no bounds and speaks the language of every region of the earth. Contemporary humanity, tried as it is by old and new forms of misery and poverty, more than ever needs to experience God's love and mercy. It needs to feel loved, if it is to love and welcome life.

Unfortunately, you work where there are many serious attacks on life, the fruit of a culture of death that tends to become more widespread in societies infected by materialism and hedonistic consumerism. Continue, dear sisters, to keep this in mind and to work generously on this apostolic "front". It is a matter of urgent pastoral need, that has to be faced with professional competence and apostolic zeal.

4. To be able to carry out such a demanding mission, you will need to be committed to formation on a broad scale and, appropriately, your Chapter intends to stress this priority. It is necessary to foster the spiritual life and, in wise harmony with it, the cultural, professional and apostolic dimensions and that of your specific charism (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, n. 71). Moreover, you must pay special attention to community life; indeed, it is an

integral and decisive part of ecclesial witness, especially in a community of consecrated life that is called to be a prophetic sign in the midst of the People of God.

Dear Sisters, with these thoughts I assure you of my special remembrance in prayer so that the serene and strong light of the Holy Spirit may shine on each of you and on the work of the Chapter.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick, assist you and make all your initiatives prosper. May she give you the joy and love of serving her divine Son in your needy neighbour. May my Apostolic Blessing, which I cordially impart to you and to your entire religious family, be a comfort to you.

From Castel Gandolfo, 12 September, 2002.

JOHN PAUL II