



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO PAKISTAN, PHILIPPINES I, GUAM (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA II), JAPAN, ANCHORAGE (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA II)
(FEBRUARY 16-27, 1981)

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
DURING THE MEETING WITH WOMEN RELIGIOUS
IN THE NATIONAL SHRINE
OF OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP**

Manila

Tuesday, 17 February 1981

Dearly beloved Sisters,

I bless the providence of God that has brought me back to Manila, back to this Sanctuary of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, where I once celebrated Mass. I bless the providence of God that has brought me to you, and you to me. It always brings me happiness to be with Sisters during my apostolic journeys, but today there is the special joy of knowing that your country is one of those where vocations to the consecrated life are flourishing, and that this generous response to grace is itself a gift of God to you.

1. And as I thank the Lord for the many people whom he has called to the religious life, I wish to express to you my esteem and affection in Christ Jesus, and I wish to offer you my encouragement. In the first place, I would like to help you preserve and increase in your hearts the reverence and love for your sublime vocation. I pray that every day you will respond to that vocation more generously, so that you will grow steadily in the likeness of Christ your Ideal and your Teacher : for your *religious consecration is essentially an act of love* for Jesus Christ.

2. The more intensely you live this love and unite yourselves more closely to Jesus, the greater witness you will bear to the Gospel. It has often been noted that there is a close connection

between the fervor of the religious life of a country and the condition of the Church in that country : fervent religious life means a living and apostolic Church; where that fervor grows cold, the vitality of the local Church is reduced. If, by a mischance, tepidity and mediocrity were to set in, they would soon be reflected among the Christian people. On the other hand, throughout the history of the Church, when she has been assailed by crises, it has always been the religious life that has given the signal for a reawakening and a renewed fidelity to the Gospel.

And your own responsibility in this regard is increased by the fact of the special situation prevailing in the Philippines. Yours is a land profoundly marked by Catholicism, in an immense part of the world that needs the witness of a fervent and vital Church, so that the Gospel may be more widely known and embraced.

3. You have perfectly understood this, and all your activity shows that *your generous consecration to the love of God makes you particularly capable of loving all your brothers and sisters*, ready to spend yourselves for them with no thought of self and without reserve. I know how hard you work for children, for the sick and the aged, for families, for the poor and for the many refugees who have come to this region. I know that you share in catechetical work, and I assure you that this work is deeply appreciated by the Bishops. You are truly witnesses to Christ's love, and your Pastors are thankful for your own loving presence and activity among those whom the Savior loves with a special love. In the name of Jesus and in the name of his Church I thank you all.

At the same time I would assure you that the transformation of the world and the building up of Christ's Kingdom of justice and peace can be effected only by grace and the power of God's love in us. Only love can transform hearts, and without love there can be no adequate reform of structures in society. The only violence that leads to the building up of the Kingdom of Christ is the sacrifice and service that are born of love.

4. I also express my gratitude to those of you who live *the cloistered and contemplative life*, so open to the presence of the living God, in the midst of a world that is so often confused and is groping to find the light. You are so deeply needed. And through your daily life of prayer and sacrifice, united with the oblation of Christ, you powerfully aid your Sisters in the active apostolate. You are, moreover, of great assistance to the whole Church and its visible Head in the mission of proclaiming Christ, and I tell you that I count very much upon your collaboration and your supplications to the Lord.

5. The mission of Religious is thus a very important one. And in order to help you to respond to it ever more perfectly, I would like to mention three points of fundamental importance.

First, there is your task of *being witnesses*. By reason of your *baptism*, you must be a sign and instrument of union with God and of the salvation of the world. It is life in the Spirit that must come first, through listening to the word, through interior prayer, through the faithful accomplishment of

the task given to you, through the gift of yourselves in service, and through the humility of repentance [1]. Through your religious consecration, you are a visible testimony to the world of the deep mystery of Christ, for you represent him "in contemplation on the mountain, or proclaiming the kingdom of God to the multitudes, or healing the sick and maimed and converting sinners to a good life, or blessing children and doing good to all people, always in obedience to the will of the Father who sent him"[2].

Through your particular vocation, lived out in an Order or Congregation approved by the Church, you are a special sign of sanctification and apostolic work that gives you a specific role in the Church, a role with its own distinctive character. Always remain faithful to that vocation, in spite of temptations. Find your joy in preserving your interior identity and in being outwardly recognized for what you are.

The second point that I wish to mention is *prayer*. It is vital that everyone should appreciate the need for prayer and should actually pray, but Religious, as people called to be specialists in prayer, must seek God and love him above all things; in all circumstances, they must strive to live a life hidden with Christ in God, a life from which love of neighbor springs and becomes a pressing need. You must therefore, through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, intensify your personal and communal familiarity with the principal source of apostolic and charitable activity, and in this way you will be sharing intimately in the mission which takes its origin from the Father.

As I said in my message to the Plenary Meeting of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, "your first duty is to be with Christ. A constant danger for those engaged in apostolic work is to become so engrossed in work for the Lord as to forget the Lord of the work". And so, in the taxing routine of your apostolic tasks, always make sure that you devote periods of each day to personal and community prayer. These times of prayer must be carefully guarded and suitably prolonged, and you must not hesitate to supplement them by periods of more intense recollection and prayer, at times especially set aside for this purpose.

You must always ensure that the natural center of your communities is the Eucharist: you will accomplish this by your fervent daily participation in the Mass, and by community prayer in an oratory where the Eucharistic presence of Christ expresses and realizes what must be the principal mission of every religious family[3].

The third point that I wish to mention is *loving docility to the Church's Magisterium*, which is an obvious consequence of the special ecclesial position which is yours. As you know, religious life has no meaning except in the Church and in faithfulness to her directives. "It would be a serious mistake to make the two realities—religious life and ecclesial structures—dependent one of the other, or to oppose one to the other as if they could subsist as two distinct entities, one charismatic, the other institutional. Both elements, namely, the spiritual gifts and the ecclesial structures, form one, even though complex, reality"[4]. So I exhort you to be always ready to

embrace the teaching of the Church, and, in fidelity to your charism, to collaborate in the pastoral activity of your local dioceses, under the direction of your Bishops united to Peter and in union with Christ.

Your adherence to the word of God as it is proclaimed by the Church will be the measure of your effectiveness in communicating the truth and the freedom of Christ. The same Holy Spirit who makes us attentive to "the signs of the times" has endowed Christ's Church with the apostolic and pastoral charism of Magisterium, so that she may effectively transmit Christ's vivifying and liberating word of truth. Let us always remember the words of Jesus : "You will learn the truth and the truth will make you free"[5].

6. It is so appropriate that our meeting takes place today in this Sanctuary dedicated to Mary, Mother of Perpetual Help, the title which reminds us that we are in constant need of her protection. As the Council teaches, the Mother of God is the Christian's model in faith, love and perfect union with Christ[6]; and in a special way she is the *Mother and model of those who live the consecrated life*.

You show your devotion to Mary by celebrating her feasts, by daily prayer in her honor and especially the Rosary, and by imitating her life. May that devotion grow stronger every day.

Your consecrated life should mirror Mary's life : the "yes" which she uttered at the Annunciation was nothing but a confirmation of her previous attitude, and the point of departure for a journey in the Lord's company that lasted all her life. In this way, Mary reminds Religious of the need to respond ever more generously to the Lord's plans for them. Each one will give this response in the first place by her openness to the Holy Spirit, by her continual conversion to Christ, by her chastity, poverty and obedience, in short by the unending discovery of her vocation and mission in the Church. And this constitutes that "continued formation" that for a number of years has been put forward as being so necessary.

7. The consecrated life of your religious is lived in the context of an ecclesially approved Institute and for this reason has a *community element*. It concerns all Religious, whatever their place in their communities. Each Institute has responsibility for the formation of its members according to its proper charism and in fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church. In this regard the union among sisters, devotion to others, interest in the world's problems, and the wholesome organization of daily life will sustain and foster the efforts of all concerned.

8. I would like to extend an earnest invitation to you to intensify your apostolic collaboration at *the service of Christian families*. This is in harmony with the conclusions reached by the recent Synod of Bishops. The links between families and the religious life are both profound and vital; the Christian family is the normal source of vocations to the religious life. Religious life will help families to become ever more Christian and to witness ever more clearly to the love of Christ, by

assisting them in the Christian education of their children, in caring for the sick and in meeting the problems of life.

9. By your contact with families and through the example of holiness that you give in all your apostolates, you are able to be instruments of God's grace in regard to religious vocations. Indeed, you have been given this role to play: *through prayer and your joyful lives of consecration* to the Lord you are called to make the religious vocation in the Church something attractive to young girls and young women today. They must be able to perceive clearly—being convinced by the witness you give—that your lives are permeated with a personal love for your spouse Jesus Christ, a love that also embraces him in the whole of humanity.

In my first Encyclical I mentioned that we "cannot live without love". We remain incomprehensible to ourselves if we do not experience it and make it our own^[7]. And it is when we do bear witness to a joyful and sacrificial love that our way of life becomes credible and the call of Christ, humanly speaking, becomes attractive and worth following. To be able to show the young that consecrated love for Jesus can itself fulfill the deepest aspirations of the human person is a great mission of faith, and, dear Sisters, it is yours.

Finally, I thank you once again for your help in making this pilgrimage possible through your prayers and your ready aid. I entrust all your intentions to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and I ask her to assist you to live your vocation ever more generously, for the coming of the Kingdom of her beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. For in the words of Saint Peter : "Without having seen him, you love him; though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy"^[8].

Beloved Sisters : Praised be Jesus Christ !

[1] Cf. *Mutuae Relationes*, 4b.

[2] *Lumen Gentium*, 46.

[3] Cf. *Evangelica Testificatio*, 48.

[4] *Mutuae Relationes*, 34.

[5] *Jn* 8:31.

[6] Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 63.

[7] Cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.

[8] 1 Pt 1:8.

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