



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE
TO NORWAY, ICELAND, FINLAND,
DENMARK AND SWEDEN

MEETING WITH THE RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS OF SWEDEN

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Church of Saint Lawrence, Uppsala
Friday, 9 June 1989*

*Dear Sisters, Religious Superiors of Sweden,
Dear Friends in Christ,
Peace be with you!*

1. I am very happy to have this opportunity to be here, albeit briefly, to share with you the joy of following Christ of serving him and of leading others to him. The presence of women religious is a great blessing to the Church in Sweden. You live the evangelical counsels in a spirit of charity and self-denial, and exercise apostolates that include teaching in schools and kindergartens, caring for the sick, publishing, as well as other forms of service. You work in a true ecumenical spirit, respecting the faith of others while giving an eloquent Catholic witness to Christ among people who are often unfamiliar with the Church and her teaching.

Fidelity to Christ challenges you to grow in your witness of chastity, poverty and obedience. In today's world *the witness of poverty* in particular strikes a chord in many hearts. Vowed poverty speaks a language of trust in Divine Providence which is contrary to the trends in society towards excessive consumerism and purely material progress. By following in the footsteps of Christ who was poor, my dear Sisters, you inspire many others in their search for a simpler and more authentic way of life. You can become true teachers in the ways of giving, following the example of Christ who, "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2Cor. 8, 9).

You are no doubt concerned about the *future of religious life* in Sweden, considering that the number of those choosing the religious life is not as great as you would wish. Always remember, however, that the Lord's call can never be understood in merely human terms; it is a mystery, the work of the Holy Spirit. A vocation "does not always emerge in an atmosphere favourable to it; sometimes the grace of vocation passes *through an unfavourable environment* and even through occasional resistance by parents or families" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Epistula universis Presbyteris, Feria V in Cena Domini, anni MCMLXXXIX missa, 7, die 12 mar. 1989: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, XII, 1 [1989]*). For this reason, we must continue to pray that the voice of God will not be stifled or go unheeded among young people.

2. I wish to thank you, *the Members of the Parish Council*, for your work in the service of the Church and for the gift of your time and talents in building up the parish which, as the Second Vatican Council said, "offers an outstanding example of community apostolate" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 10). I thank you too for your generous cooperation with your priests in meeting the pastoral challenges that face the Church. As members of the Parish of Saint Lars, you can draw upon the prayers and example of your holy patron. Inspired by Saint Laurence's example of service and martyrdom as a deacon in ancient Rome, may you and your fellow parishioners bring Christ to modern-day Sweden – to your families, neighbours and friends.

3. To all who are here today I wish to offer encouragement in the Lord. May you *continue with joy and confidence* along the path to which God has called you. May your love for God and neighbour be ever more visible in Sweden, as you proclaim the Gospel to those both far away and near (Cfr. *Is. 58, 19*). As a pledge of our faith in the constant help and protection of Mary, the Mother of God, let us commend our lives and actions to her in prayer.

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