



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE VOLUNTEERS OF SUFFERING**

Saturday, 6 September 1997

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

1. I am particularly pleased to have this meeting with you. I extend my most cordial greeting to you, with a special affectionate thought for those who, coming from very distant places, faced the discomfort of the journey rather than miss this appointment.

This year you are commemorating the 50th anniversary of your worthy association, founded in Rome by the Servant of God Mons. Luigi Novarese, assisted by Miss Elvira Myriam Psorulla, whom I thank for her words expressing the sentiments of all those present. She wished to confirm the resolution of the whole sodality to serve Christ in those who suffer through a particular work of evangelization and catechesis, which highlights the personal and direct work of the disabled themselves.

Mons. Novarese, spiritually present among us, is certainly accompanying from heaven this work which sprung from his priestly heart. And with him, spiritually close to us are all the "volunteers of suffering" who, over this half century, have departed from this world, bringing with them the viaticum of sharing in the mystery of Jesus' Cross.

2. Your association had as its original nucleus the Priestly Marian League, founded in 1943. Mons Novarese wanted to respond with this initiative to the Virgin's request in the apparitions at Lourdes and Fatima. He also wanted to follow the invitation of my venerable Predecessor Pius XII concerning the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

He was aware that Mary herself, united with her divine Son at the foot of the Cross, teaches us to endure suffering with Christ and in Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit's love. *Mary is the first and perfect "volunteer of suffering"*, uniting her own sorrow to her son's sacrifice, so that it may acquire redemptive meaning.

It is from this Marian matrix that you, dear "Volunteers of Suffering", were born. You carry out an extremely valuable apostolate in the Christian community. You form part of that great movement of ecclesial renewal that, faithful to the Second Vatican Council and attentive to the signs of the times, has found new energy for working courageously in the field of evangelization in an area, such as suffering, that is certainly not easy and is so full of questions.

Your pastoral orientation found its explicit confirmation in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, which, with regard to the "pastoral activity for and with the sick and suffering", states: "The sick person, bearer of a disability, or the suffering individual, [must not be considered] simply as an object of the Church's love and service, but as an *active and responsible participant in the work of evangelization and salvation*" (n. 54).

On the occasion of the Holy Year of Redemption, I myself wished to offer to the Church, with the Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris*, a reflection on the salvific value of human pain (cf. AAS 76, 1984), and I thank you because you helped to spread this message, not only verbally but by the silent witness of your lives.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, your leader, in expressing the attitude that your founder would have today, has promised to *co-operate* intensely with prayer and sacrifice *in the preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000*.

The word Jubilee suggests the idea of joy, of exultation, and therefore could at first sight appear in contrast with the condition of those who suffer. Actually it would be so, if we confined ourselves to a purely human consideration. But in the light of faith, we understand that that there is no Resurrection without the Cross. We understand then that not only can suffering be in harmony with joy, but, indeed, that it is only in the sign of the Cross that we can attain true, consoling Christian joy. There can be no authentic *Jubilee preparation* unless we include *the experience of suffering* in its various forms in our spiritual journey.

4. The great goals the Church proposes to us for these three years of journey towards the Great Jubilee cannot be reached without the personal and community sacrifice of Christians, in union with Christ's one redeeming sacrifice. In this regard, your association can make its own specific contribution by helping the faithful who suffer not to feel excluded from the spiritual journey towards the Year 2000, but, on the contrary, to *walk in the front line*, carrying the glorious Cross of Christ, the only hope of life for humanity in every age.

An extraordinary example of this silent mission of love, which is born from constant contemplation of Jesus on the Cross, is Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who yesterday returned to the Father's house. This morning I celebrated Holy Mass for her with deep emotion. She was an unforgettable witness to a love expressed in concrete and unceasing service to our poorest and most marginalized brothers and sisters. In the face of the destitute she saw that of Jesus who from the Cross implores: "I thirst". And she took up this cry with generous dedication from the lips and hearts of the dying, of abandoned children, of men and women oppressed by the burden of suffering and loneliness.

Tirelessly traveling the streets of the whole world, Mother Teresa has marked the history of our century: she courageously defended life; she served all human beings by always promoting their dignity and respect; she made "life's losers" feel the tenderness of God, the loving Father of all his creatures. She witnessed to the Gospel of love, which is nourished by the generous gift of self until death. This is how we remember her, while invoking for her the prize that awaits every faithful servant of the kingdom of God. May her shining example of love comfort and inspire her spiritual family, the Church and all mankind.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you once again for this festive meeting and I hope that the activity of your association may draw benefit from its 50th anniversary. In imploring the Virgin Mary's maternal protection, I sincerely impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you here present and to all the Volunteers of Suffering, as well as to the Silent Workers of the Cross and to the members of the Priestly Marian League.