



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE COMMUNITIES OF BETHLEHEM,
THE ASSUMPTION AND ST BRUNO**

Saturday, 14 March 1998

*To the Monastic Communities of Bethlehem,
the Assumption of the Virgin and St Bruno*

1. As your communities meet in extraordinary assembly, I am pleased to extend a cordial greeting to you and to assure you of my fervent prayer on your behalf.

Your monastic family, in its two branches, intends to follow Christ by taking its inspiration from the spirituality of Eastern and Western monasticism, particularly from the wisdom of St Bruno. It is by attentive listening to the Gospel and by following the example of the Virgin Mary that you wish to give yourselves to God through a life of solitude, silence, prayer and contemplation. I encourage you to live fully your offering to the Lord in love for the Church and in fidelity to her laws, as well as in communion with the Successor of Peter and by maintaining trustful relations with the Bishops of the Dioceses where your communities have been established.

2. The Magisterium, particularly the Second Vatican Council, brought to light the central place of contemplative life in the Church: "Institutes completely devoted to contemplation ... will always have an honoured place in the Mystical Body of Christ, in which "all the members do not have the same function" (Rom 12:4)" (*Perfectae caritatis*, n. 7). I myself wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*: "Institutes completely devoted to contemplation, composed of either women or men, are for the Church a reason for pride and a source of heavenly graces. By their lives and mission, the members of these institutes imitate Christ in his prayer on the mountain, bear witness to God's lordship over history and anticipate the glory which is to come" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 8). Therefore I hope that by letting yourselves be transformed by the power of love, you will shine brightly among men as signs of God's holiness. Be faithful to following Jesus in the desert, in his

solitary moments with the Father, in order to become worshipers in spirit and truth! People today look for ardent witnesses to the Gospel who will offer them places of spirituality where they can meet and adore the living God, and who will help them to give meaning to their lives.

By following the spirit of St Bruno in solitude and the silence of the desert, you will receive the gifts of peace and joy from the Lord: "There strong men can be recollected as often as they wish, abide within themselves, carefully cultivate the seeds of virtue and be happily nourished by the fruits of paradise. Here is acquired that eye by whose serene gaze the Bridegroom is wounded with love; that eye, pure and clean, by which God is seen" (St Bruno, *Letter to Raoul le Verd*).

3. At the centre of your consecrated life you wish to give an essential place to the Lord's Eucharist. By celebrating and contemplating this mystery in solitude, you unite yourselves to Jesus' offering to his Father, you commit yourselves to following him and you renounce everything that can hinder the acceptance of his love. By receiving his Body and Blood given as food, consecrated persons are particularly called to become faithful disciples in likeness to Christ, and they unite their unreserved "yes" to that of the Father's loving Son. Thus, by the total gift of their being, they join it to the memorial of the paschal sacrifice offered out of love for all humanity. And they joyfully remember that "frequent and prolonged adoration of Christ present in the Eucharist enables us in some way to relive Peter's experience at the Transfiguration: "It is well that we are here". In the celebration of the mystery of the Lord's Body and Blood, the unity and charity of those who have consecrated their lives to God are strengthened and increased" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 95). In profound harmony with the Eucharist, frequent recourse to the sacrament of Reconciliation, with the respect that it implies for the interior freedom of each individual, leads to the purification needed for making one's relationship with God ever more transparent and for growing in fidelity to the commitments made. May the daily meeting with Christ be for

each of you a constant call to holiness, in expectation of the Lord's return!

4. In the likeness of Mary and with her, continually listen to the Word of God, keeping it and pondering it day and night in your heart! This word, an inexhaustible source of spiritual life that sheds the light of Wisdom on human existence, will transform you and enable you to grow. Like the disciples at Emmaus, may you recognize the Risen One on your paths of solitude and say yourselves: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Lk 24:32). Familiarity with the Word of God, which nourishes contemplation, enables you to receive light for recognizing the Lord's ways through the signs of the times and for discerning God's designs. In fact, by seeking the will of the Father in order to fulfil it day after day, you are advancing on the paths of Jesus himself, the Son who became obedient to the point of giving his own life so that all might be saved. It is in this obedience that he fulfilled the mission he had received from his Father, who then raised him in glory.

5. St Bruno teaches you to love every human person, without distinction, as Jesus loved him. Your

consecration to prayer and adoration also commits you to interceding for the Church and the world. It should be a witness to the Church's love for her Lord as well as a contribution to the growth of God's People. In this way you are sharing in the Church's mission, which is an essential duty for all institutes of consecrated life. The profession of the evangelical counsels makes consecrated persons totally free for the service of the Gospel. "Indeed, more than in external works, the mission consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness. This is the challenge, this is the primary task of the consecrated life! The more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in the world for the salvation of all" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 72). Dear brothers and sisters, let Christ take hold of you in order to make your contribution to the sanctification of the world!

6. By your monastic profession, and particularly by the vows you take and the practice of asceticism, you wish to show in a radical way the primacy of God and of the good things to come. May this total gift of yourselves allow you to be transformed by God's grace and fully conformed to Christ, in fraternal communities where each individual can grow in the truth of his being!

For several years you have been drafting Constitutions for your two branches, in order to discern the call of the Spirit and answer it in obedience. Now that you are preparing to receive the decree of papal recognition for your communities, I encourage you to continue your reflection in a trusting dialogue with the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, in order to give all your members a Rule of Life which commits them to living their vocation to holiness in inner peace and generous self-giving. The Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, the fruit of the Synod of Bishops, will help you to reflect more deeply on the gift you have received from God and to put it at the service of the Church and her apostolic mission.

7. In this second year of preparation for celebrating the Great Jubilee, dedicated to the Holy Spirit and his sanctifying presence within the community of disciples, I ask you to keep watchful vigil among men and to become more and more involved in the new evangelization, in accordance with your own charism lived in communion with the Church. May this favourable time for prayer and adoration allow you further to discover the Spirit as "the One who builds the kingdom of God within the course of history and prepares its full manifestation in Jesus Christ, stirring people's hearts and quickening in our world the seeds of the full salvation which will come at the end of time" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 45). While entrusting you to the maternal protection of Our Lady of the Assumption and the intercession of St Bruno, I most cordially grant you my affectionate Apostolic Blessing.

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