



The Holy See

SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF PENANCE AND CHRISTIAN CHARITY, ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR GENERAL CHAPTER

Dear Sisters,

With affection in the Lord I address you, the Franciscan Sisters of Penance and Christian Charity, on the occasion of your General Chapter. My cordial greeting goes above all to Sister Christina Pecoraro, your General Minister, and to the Sisters taking part in the Chapter. I assure you all of my closeness in prayer in these days as you seek to discern, in a spirit of prayerful reflection, the direction to be taken in meeting the challenges of the present, confident in the power of God's grace to create a future of hope and to renew all things in Christ.

The theme you have chosen for your Chapter, "Moved in God", reflects your commitment to build upon the rich spiritual heritage of your foundress, Mother Magdalen Daemen, which has inspired the witness of religious consecration and the missionary commitment of generations of Sisters in the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Indonesia, Brazil and the United States. The fruitfulness of that founding charism continues to be evident today in your Congregation's more recent missions in Tanzania, Libya, Mexico, Guatemala, Irian Jaya and East and West Timor. How can we not recognize, at the heart of this remarkable spiritual and apostolic "movement", the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom Mother Magdalen came to know and love from her earliest years? It was Christ who first chose each of you (cf. *Jn 15:16*) and sent you forth in the power of the Holy Spirit to bear fruit for the growth of his Kingdom. All mission has its ultimate source in the movement of God's grace in our hearts; every apostolate is inspired and ultimately grounded in Christ's call to discipleship. For this reason, I encourage you, as true daughters of Saint Francis, to promote in every aspect of your Congregation's life a commitment to conversion, penance, intense prayer and contemplation as the basis for your presence and mission in the world. By being "moved in God", may you be channels of his peace in a world often tragically beset by conflict, division and injustice.

Significantly, your Chapter is meeting on the eve of the Church's celebration of the Great Jubilee, which is meant to give her "a new awareness of the salvific mission she has received from Christ" (Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 21). A significant part of the General Chapter, in fact,

will be a pilgrimage to Greccio, the place where Saint Francis proclaimed the mystery of Christ's Incarnation in all its simplicity and radiant beauty. May the light of Christ and the joy of the Great Jubilee fill your hearts with hope during these days of discernment and decision, and awaken in all the Franciscan Sisters of Penance and Christian Charity a renewed commitment to the mission of the Congregation. As you strive to respond to the needs of the many people you encounter in your varied apostolates, may you, like Saint Francis, radiate the "peace of God which surpasses all understanding" (*Phil 4:7*) and which invites human hearts, amid the noise and distractions of the world, to know and love Jesus Christ and to live in justice and peace as God's beloved sons and daughters. As an international Congregation, your witness of fraternal charity and respect for others, your commitment to justice, the promotion of human rights and dignity, education and healing, can be a powerful sign of the presence of Christ's universal Kingdom and its unbounded reconciling grace. In a very special way, your elderly sisters, who represent such a rich resource of spirituality and wisdom in your midst, can serve as an example and, by their prayers and sacrifices, a source of immense grace and spiritual fruitfulness in carrying forward the Congregation's mission in this generation.

Dear Sisters, we know that "mission strengthens the consecrated life, gives it new enthusiasm and new motivation, and elicits faithfulness" (Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 78). As your General Chapter strives to foster in the lives of each Sister and in the life of the entire Congregation full fidelity to the founding charism and an ever deeper union of mind and heart with the universal Church, I pray that all of you will experience that inner renewal which is the foundation and guarantee of fruitfulness in the apostolate. Invoking upon you the light and strength of the Holy Spirit, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

From the Vatican, 15 November 1999