



# The Holy See

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## ***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE DAUGHTERS OF MERCY AND THE CROSS***

*Saturday, 8 January 2000*

*Dear Sisters, Daughters of Mercy and the Cross!*

1. I am very pleased to welcome you and to extend my cordial greeting to each of you. I thank you for this visit on the occasion of the 17th General Chapter of your institute: it is meant as a renewed testimony of your fidelity to the Successor of Peter.

I express my congratulations and best wishes to Mother Romilde Zauner, reconfirmed in the office of Superior General. I extend my affectionate thoughts to all the Daughters of Mercy and the Cross, who carry out their work of evangelization and solidarity in Italy, Ethiopia, Mexico and Romania.

Your congregation's Chapter acquires special significance because it is being held at the beginning of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, in which the Church is called to reflect intensely on the mystery of the Incarnation of the Father's Only-begotten Son. The entrance into the new millennium is for every believer, and even more so for consecrated men and women, a call to become more aware of the responsibilities linked to their Baptism and, especially, to broaden their vision of faith to the horizons of the new evangelization. But in order to make this missionary task more concrete, it is necessary to return with stronger fidelity to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which casts new light on the Church's apostolic activity in relation to the challenges of the modern world.

The sound tradition of each institute and reference to the constant Magisterium of the Church form the sure foundation on which to develop the works and apostolate of every religious family, aimed at an essential renewal of its structures, according to the needs of the times.

2. *"In Mother Zangàra's yesterday lies our today as women consecrated to be, together with the laity, a memory and prophecy of mercy":* this is the theme that guided you during your Chapter. The memory of your foundress and her spiritual presence among you are a sure guarantee of your fidelity to the institute's original charism, which asks you to *be conformed to Christ crucified by practising the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.*

How important it is to reaffirm your mission as Daughters of Mercy and the Cross at the beginning of the Holy Year, which offers us a particular expression of God's merciful love! It is only by drawing from it that you can become authentic prophets and witnesses to God and his kingdom. It is only by imitating and following the chaste, poor and obedient Christ that you will be able to fulfil yourselves in total dedication to divine mercy.

Modern man, although conditioned by the many allurements of a society that is often affluent and prone to selfishness - and perhaps precisely for this reason - is more sensitive than ever to acts of disinterested love. This is the challenge you are called to take up and translate into the basic choice to walk and work together with the laity, in order to reveal the profound meaning of the redeeming Passion and to show concern for every form of suffering.

Through every work of mercy should shine the welcoming face of Christ so that many people, who still have not met him or have built up a false idea about him, can recognize him as he truly is, the only Saviour of mankind. This means that your apostolic activity must always be accompanied by the frequent contemplation of Jesus exalted on the Cross. It is from the Cross that the Word, in silence and solitude, "prophetically affirms the absolute transcendence of God over all created things; in his own flesh he conquers our sin and draws every man and every woman to himself, giving to all the new life of the Resurrection" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 23). The more you remain at the foot of the Cross, making your own the attitude of the Virgin Mary's universal motherhood, the more you will grow in experiencing the truth of God-Mercy and be able to transmit it to everyone you meet on your daily path.

3. Vast and demanding is the Christian mission of serving the Gospel. For this reason it is necessary to coordinate the contributions of the various ecclesial bodies in a spirit of openness and collaboration. In particular, this is required of your congregation in relation to the laity of the Zangarian Ecclesial Movement. May it thus be your constant concern to share with them the desire to proclaim the Lord's love everywhere. May you undertake with the laity new paths of fraternal communion and mutual cooperation, which will allow you a more effective missionary outreach beyond the confines of the institute itself. You can count on renewed energies in the service of the Church. If, on the one hand, the edifying example of consecrated persons will encourage the laity to live and bear witness to the spirit of the Gospel beatitudes, on the other, the participation of the laity can lead to rich and sometimes unexpected insights into certain aspects of the charism, "leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it and helping to draw from it directions for new activities in the apostolate" (*ibid*, n. 55).

4. Dear Daughters of Mercy and the Cross! If Christ is to be at the heart of your every project, do not forget that you will meet him above all by serving the very poor. Therefore, faithful to the vocation you have embraced, seek first those who are in situations of greater weakness and poverty. May the "last" be the "first" for you, as they once were for your foundress, Mother Zangàra. And involve the laity in this extraordinary conversion to love. Your institute will thus be faithful to its original charism and will give glory to God among the men and women of the dawning millennium.

This is a task that I willingly entrust to you. I entrust it symbolically to you, dear capitulars, and through you to all your sisters. I extend a special thought to the elderly and ill sisters, who are an irreplaceable spiritual support for the institute. By accepting their suffering or their forced inactivity and offering it to the Lord, they effectively contribute to the apostolate of the other sisters, providing them with fruitful and valuable help.

May your love for divine mercy and the Cross, which enlightened and transformed the life of your foundress, be a constant beacon for each of you in your prayer and action, so that your institute may draw today's men and women to the Heart of Christ. This is an important contribution that you can make to the celebration of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

May Our Lady of Sorrows protect and accompany you, ensuring special fruitfulness for the work of the General Chapter: with her motherly tenderness may she make you wise and watchful women.

In offering my prayer to the Lord for your entire religious family, I cordially bless the Mother General, the capitulars and all your sisters, as well all those who assist you in your mission.

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