



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE SYLVESTRINE BENEDICTINES

Saturday 8 September 2001

Venerable Sylvestrine Benedictines,

1. I am happy to meet you on the occasion of your General Chapter, and welcome each one of you cordially. I greet Fr Andrea Pantaloni, re-elected Abbot General, and thank him for his kind words on behalf of all. I greet the Chapter Fathers and the entire Family of Sylvestrine Benedictines, ever ready to offer the Church the precious contribution of their spiritual and apostolic work.

The Chapter meeting is a providential opportunity for your Institute to reflect on the challenges of the present time and to seek new ways in which to express your charism. You have therefore fittingly chosen to spend these days of prayer and intense work at Fabriano, in the Hermitage of Montefano called after your founder, *St Sylvester Abbot*, who in this very site grafted a new congregation onto the fruitful tree of the Benedictine Order in 1231. A contemplative and anxious to be consistent with the Gospel, Sylvester became a hermit, practising a strict ascetical life and growing in a deep and vigorous spirituality. For his disciples he chose St Benedict's Rule, wishing to build a community that would be dedicated to contemplation but would not ignore the surrounding social reality. In fact, he himself united a life of recollection, with the ministry of an esteemed spiritual fatherhood and the proclamation of the Gospel to the people of the region.

2. On these solid foundations, Your Congregation has lived through *more than seven centuries of history*, overcoming numerous difficulties. In the mid-19th century it expanded to horizons beyond Europe and introduced the Benedictine Rule in Asia, in the Island of Ceylon - today Sri Lanka. In the course of the past century new foundations were made in the United States of America, in Australia, in India and, recently, in the Philippines. This comforting development continues to bear valuable apostolic and missionary fruit. With monasteries on four continents, the Congregation can

certainly claim to be international, and, thanks be to God, to be slowly and constantly increasing in number.

As I encourage you to continue on this journey opening yourselves to the demands of the new evangelization, I pray the Lord that he may always help you with the power of his love. May God bless in particular your project for further foundations in Europe and in Africa, so that your spirituality may spread for his glory and for the good of souls.

3. The lofty and demanding goal to which we must ceaselessly aspire, Fathers, is first and foremost holiness. It is important not to forget it, especially in our time, when our society feels the need for God more than ever. In our daily apostolate, we must keep our spirit turned toward God. There is a keen awareness of this in your Congregation in which down through the ages the Holy Spirit has inspired *generous monks who distinguished themselves by their example and apostolic zeal*. It is enough to think, in modern times, of the missionary Bishops Giuseppe Bravi, Ilarione Sillani and Giuseppe Pagnani, Vicars Apostolic of Colombo in the 19th century; of Beekmayer, the first native Prelate of Ceylon, and of Bernardo Regno, Bishop of Kandy. Twenty years after his holy death, his fame lives on among the poor workers of the tea plantations, as well as in his native Fabriano. The foundation's two pioneers in the United States in 1910 also deserve special mention: Giuseppe Cipolletti and Filippo Bartocchetti, who were patient, fearless missionaries among the miners of Kansas. And lastly, I would like to recall the Servant of God, Abbot Ildebrando Gregori, whose cause of canonization has been introduced.

May striving for holiness be the first and basic goal of your personal and community life. This is why the Lord called you and entrusted an important apostolic mission to you.

4. The theme of your Chapter Assembly: *Celebrating the Memory, Celebrating our Hope*, inspired by the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* goes with this mandate. You would like to focus your attention on monastic identity in the third millennium, according to the spirit of the holy Benedictine Fathers, Sts Benedict and Sylvester, in order to give life to "evangelical communities that are multicultural, and open to the future, but, at the same time, firmly rooted in tradition".

Today, a monastic family like yours is called to make a valid contribution, above all, to the contemplative dimension of personal and ecclesial life. It is urgently necessary to respond to the men and women of our time who, often in an implicit way, ask: "we wish to see Jesus" (Jn 12,21), showing them, in the first place by our example, the royal road of prayer that leads them to contemplate the face of God revealed in Christ. Therefore, dear friends, fervently contemplate his holy Face, so that Jesus' message may shine forth in your lives.

From unceasing prayer draw renewed vigour in order to "put out into the deep" fearlessly, setting out, in accordance with your charism, on the way of total dedication to Christ and to His Gospel. Thus you will build communities that are open to the future and rooted in tradition in constant

fidelity to the Rule of your Fathers, Benedict and Sylvester.

In this journey, may the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose Nativity we celebrate today, grant you her maternal assistance. May her *Magnificat* that celebrates the memory and hope of the People of God become your Congregation's canticle of praise at the beginning of this new millennium.

I enrich these wishes with the assurance of my prayer and a special Apostolic Blessing which I impart to you, to your confreres and to all who are entrusted to your apostolic care.