



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PLENARY OF THE CONGREGATION
FOR THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE
AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE**

Your Eminences, Brothers in the Episcopate and Priesthood!

1. *"To those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (I Cor 1,2-3).

With the greeting of the Apostle St Paul to the Christians at Corinth, I address Cardinal Eduardo Martínez Somalo, who with wisdom and prudence governs the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. I wish to greet the Cardinals, Bishops and Officials of the Congregation taking part in the Plenary whose theme is: *"Set out anew from Christ, a renewed commitment of consecrated life in the third millennium"*.

I thank you for cooperating with the Holy See in discerning the future course for consecrated persons. The Church counts on the dedication of this chosen company of her sons and daughters, on their longing for holiness and on their service "as a means of promoting and supporting every Christian's desire for perfection" and to reinforce the "solidarity with one's neighbour, especially the most needy" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 39). In this way, they witness to the living impact of Christ's charity among men and women.

2. I cannot forget the great Jubilee. As it drew to a close, I invited the whole Church to continue the spiritual journey begun, setting out again with new vigour from the "contemplation of the face of Christ: Christ considered in his historical features and in his mystery, Christ known through his manifold presence in the Church and in the world, and confessed as the meaning of history and the light of life's journey" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 15).

In this journey, consecrated persons, called "to put their lives at its [the Kingdom of God] service, leaving everything behind and closely imitating his own way of life" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 14), have a teaching mission for the People of God. Listening to the Word, continual praise of the Father, giver of every good gift and the witness of concrete charity towards our neediest brothers and sisters, they show the "depth of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom 11,33).

In order to carry out this teaching mission, they have to foster genuine spiritual and apostolic relationships as part of the ordinary activity of the Church, sharing spiritual goods: the path of faith, the experience of God, the charism and the gifts of the Spirit that bring it about. Thanks to such sharing, more intense and mutual support will grow in every ecclesial Community. Each one will become responsible and, relying on each other, they will advance together in the life of faith according to the charism and ministry of each one.

3. It is an important task, that requires a renewed thirst for holiness. "The spiritual life must have first place in the programme of Families of consecrated life, in such a way that every Institute and community will be a school of true evangelical spirituality" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 93). The daily life of consecrated men and women, made luminous by constant contact with the Lord in silence and in prayer, by gratuitous love and service, especially for the poorest, witnesses that freedom is the fruit of having found the pearl of great price (cf. Mt 13, 45-46), Christ, for whom one is ready to abandon everything, affections and earthly security, saying with joy: Teacher, "I will follow you wherever you go" (Lk 9,57). It is the path of consecrated persons in many parts of the world, who even arrive at the supreme gift of their life with martyrdom.

In this deep relationship of love for Christ and of spiritual following in his footsteps, we can find the hope for the future of consecrated life. Consecrated life calls for a personal, voluntary, free, and loving commitment to holiness. Consecrated men and women are called to show forth a real spiritual "expertise" in this journey, tackling with joyful hope the sacrifice and detachment, the hardships and the expectations that are part of this path. It is the way to return to the Father's house, that Christ has opened to us and on which he has gone before us. It is at once detachment and quest; it unites the fatigue of renunciation with the joyful aspect of love (cf. Lk 9,23ff). Faithful to their vocation, they will one day be able to rejoice with the Psalmist: "Blessed are those who dwell in thy house, ever singing thy praise! Blessed are the men whose strength is in thee, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. As they go through the Bitter Valley they make it a place of springs; the autumn rain covers it with blessings. They walk with ever growing strength, they will see the God of gods in Sion" (Ps 83 [84], 5-8).

4. Consecrated persons will show forth the good example of holiness by the way they make communion the first thing that appears in consecrated life in every age. Every religious community is called to be a place where naturally one learns to pray, where one is educated to recognize and contemplate the face of Christ, growing day by day in radically following the Lord, seeking with sincerity the truth about oneself and firmly orienting oneself to serving the Kingdom of God and his

justice.

Authentic communion is born from the humble and active sharing of the faith. It leads to putting in common the gifts of goodness and grace, as well as the limits and the poverty of every person for each one to take them up and celebrate together the mercy of the Father.

Thus true communion in Christ fosters a new style of apostolate. The proclamation of the Gospel of consecrated life, when it comes from an intense and generous fraternity, becomes more living and effective. The Apostle St John teaches this in his first Letter: "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life, we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us" (I Jn 1,1b.3).

In this way, even what is special about consecrated life, the vows and the particular spirituality, becomes a gift received not to be jealously hoarded, but to be given humbly and generously to the People of God with word and witness, so that all, even the distant or the hostile, can appreciate the great originality of Christianity.

5. In the history of the Church, consecrated life has always been in the forefront of the work of evangelization. Today, as she becomes a pilgrim, walking beside everyone, sharing lives, she warms the heart with the love received in the contemplation of the face of Christ and leads a person to the abundant running waters of divine grace, sharing the bread of the Eucharist and of charity. In this mysterious journey, interwoven with giving and receiving, giving up and accepting, consecrated persons learn to recognize the challenges of today's society.

Following Christ poor, chaste and obedient, with all their heart and strength, they offer the witness of a life that can give hope to every form of commitment and be an alternative to the world's way of living.

The witness becomes the best way to encourage vocations to the consecrated life. Yes, it is necessary to present to young people the face of Christ contemplated in prayer and tenderly served in our brothers and sisters with selfless love. We must be convinced that "we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 29). Jesus assures us: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28,20). It is not enough for us to "speak" about Him; we must also make him "seen", with the bold witness of faith and charity. Christ must become the sure reference point; his Face the source of light, strength and mercy, that illumines the world. Only in Him will we find the supernatural energy that can transform the world according to the divine plan.

With the prayer that your session may be fruitful, thanks to the light and guidance of the Holy Spirit, I cordially impart to you and to all the members of the Institutes of consecrated life and of

the Societies of apostolic life my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 21 September 2001

JOHN PAUL II

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