



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE OBLATE SISTERS OF THE CHILD JESUS

Dear Sisters,

1. Your institute is celebrating its 330th anniversary today. Indeed, on 2 July 1672 Anna Moroni and 12 girls consecrated themselves to Christ in Rome, resolving to follow him and serve him in the "little", especially through catechesis and the education of youth. I am pleased to address a special Message to you on this happy occasion. I greet each one of you, with a particular thought for your Superior General, whom I thank for the sentiments she has expressed on behalf of you all.

Dear sisters, you have looked forward so much to meeting the Successor of Peter, to whom you are bound by your appreciated service in the Pontifical Sacristy, entrusted to you by my Venerable Predecessor, Bl. Innocent XI. I am grateful to you for the application and diligent care with which you have fulfilled it since then. Your spirituality, stamped by contemplation of the Child Jesus in Bethlehem, impels you to treat the holy things necessary for the liturgy in the same loving way that the Virgin Mary wrapped her newborn son in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger (cf. Lk 2,7). Adoration of the Infant Jesus encourages you to be ever more gentle and humble of heart, imitating his obedience and hard work in the Holy Family.

2. "Living the spirituality of Bethlehem, to achieve conformity with the incarnate Word": this is the charism of your congregation, closely connected with the mystery of the Incarnation. I feel that the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 was a privileged occasion for you to deepen this "spirit of Bethlehem" even further. It is the essence of spiritual childhood which, as your Congregation's Constitutions stress, helps you "through God's grace to acquire the same virtues with respect to God and your neighbour which children have by nature: innocence, spontaneity, openness, sincerity, trust, rectitude, the simplicity that is born from divine wisdom".

I am pleased with the spiritual enthusiasm that motivates you: it is the best guarantee of an

authentic renewal of consecrated life. The motto "*Duc in altum*", which I addressed to the entire Christian people in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, is significantly interpreted by your foundress' expression: "*From Bethlehem to Calvary*" which she passed on to you. Following Christ in his entire saving process, enables us to "put out into the deep" towards the boundless horizons of holiness, letting God work miracles of goodness and love in us and through us.

3. In 17th-century Rome, Anna Moroni, with her first religious, had limited means but she was rich in God; thus, with the advice of her spiritual director, Fr Cosimo Berlinsani, she was able to do great works for the little, simple people, combining faith and life and attracting many souls to Christ. Your foundress was in love with the Child Jesus and felt deeply moved by the Crucified One, whom she described as her "only book".

Faithful to your charism, you are able to respond to the new challenges of education and evangelization, giving priority, in accordance with your institute's specific character, to catechesis and the pastoral care of youth. Without letting yourselves be discouraged by difficulties and trials, continue to spread your apostolic action in the world as, for example, you have done recently - and I praise you for it - with your new institution in the suburbs of Lima, Peru. Dedication to educating children and young people is an apostolic priority that the Church has never given up and never will. This complicated pastoral context is staked on an essential aspect of Christ's mandate to the Apostles: "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ...*" (Mt 28,19).

Dear Oblate Sisters of the Child Jesus, you cooperate with many initiatives in this mission: from catechesis - your priority commitment - to parish activities, from spiritual retreats for young people to other forms of youth ministry such as lodging university students, teaching in schools, extra tutoring, helping families in difficulty, and visiting poor families as well as hospitality for pilgrims.

4. In each one of your activities, may you feel you are "nurses of the Child Jesus", seeing his face in every person you meet and spreading his virtues through filial obedience, abandonment to the Father, simplicity and *joie de vivre*, poverty and daily work, prayer and the spirit of fraternal communion. With your attractive style of spiritual childhood, it will be easy for you to involve in your apostolate the lay people who are close to you. Their collaboration is invaluable, because it complies with a clear teaching of the Second Vatican Council, and enables the Gospel leaven to spread more widely in families and in society.

I am thinking of the well-organized group of "*Animatori laici Anna Moroni*" (ALAM), (lay spiritual leaders) and the projects that you carry out with them. As I greet the many who are here today, I urge you to continue generously on this path: God will bless your efforts with many vocations and new and effective collaborators.

Dear sisters, may burning love for the Child Jesus inspire every moment of your life as well as your apostolate among young people. May you feel contemplation and action as a single call,

since only from their union springs that genuine spiritual motherhood which must guide the charitable and educational activity you are dedicated to.

May you find support in an intense and confident devotion to Blessed Mary and to her husband St Joseph, whom the heavenly Father entrusted with the care of his Only-Begotten Son made man. With affection, I once again express to you my esteem and gratitude, as I pray for each one of you and for your whole institute, which intends through its multiple activities and future prospects to live "union and harmony", with lay collaborators.

May God help you preserve and increase this precious inheritance for the good of all. With this hope, I bless you from my heart.

From the Vatican, 2 July 2002.

JOHN PAUL II