The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

Friday, 8 November 2002

Dear Daughters of Mary Help of Christians,

1. I am happy to meet you on the occasion of the General Chapter of your institute and I wish you all a cordial welcome. I greet your newly confirmed Superior General, Sister Antonia Colombo, and I thank her for her kind words on behalf of everyone present. I extend my best wishes so she may know to direct, with the assistance of the new General Council, your religious family in faithful acceptance of the ever valid teaching of the Saints John Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello. I offer a cordial greeting to the Major Rector, Don Pascual Chávez Villanueva, who wished to be present for this gathering.

In these days of intense work you wished to focus your attention on the theme, *"In the renewed covenant, the commitment of an active citizen"* - keeping ever present the programme of your Founders - *"form good Christians and upright citizens*" - that is as current in the present multicultural social situation, charged with tensions and even tragic challenges. This programme calls you, dear Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, to witness to hope on the many frontiers of the modern world, knowing how to indicate with missionary boldness new highways for evangelization and human advancement, especially at the service of the young generations. You should know how to communicate to the younger generations, in an atmosphere permeated by loving friendship according the style of Don Bosco, the message of the Gospel, summed up in the proclamation of the love of the merciful Father, ready to embrace every person in Christ.

2. To realize fully such a demanding mission, it is above all necessary to maintain constant communion with Jesus, untiringly contemplating his face in prayer, to serve him energetically in our brothers and sisters.

For this reason, I desire to repeat to you the Lord's exhortation, "to put out into the deep" (Lk 5,4) that I directed to the entire Christian people in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*. Yes! Put out into the water, dear Sisters, and confidently throw the nets in the name of the Redeemer. In an era marked by a disturbing culture, empty and "lacking direction", proclaim categorically the primacy of God who always hears the cry of the oppressed and the afflicted. The foundation of every apostolic commitment and the antidote to dangerous spiritual fragmentation is personal holiness coming from a docile listening to the Spirit who frees and transforms the heart.

Holiness is your essential and primary mission, dear Salesian Sisters. It is the best contribution you can make to the new evangelization, and the guarantee of a genuinely evangelical service for the benefit of the neediest.

3. Your religious family already boasts of a long history, written by courageous witnesses to Christ, some of whom even confirmed their fidelity to the Gospel with martyrdom. You must continue to walk on the same path even in situations that are marked by tension and fear, by opposing forces and division, by extremist elements and violence, that are capable even of blacking out hope.

However, there are plenty of apostolic opportunities and providential ferments of evangelical renewal. You, as are all men and women religious, are called to live wholeheartedly the radical choice of the Beatitudes, learning at the school of Jesus, to listen and put into practice the demanding Word of God as Mary did. As I said at Toronto, meeting with the young people from all over the world, the beatitudes describe the face of Jesus, and at the same time, that of the Christian; they are the portrait of the genuine disciple who struggles to be in perfect agreement with his divine Master.

Inspired by such spiritual fervour, you will not hesitate to push forward with prophetic freedom and wise discernment on daring apostolic highways and missionary frontiers, while you foster close collaboration with the bishops and other members of the ecclesial community. The vast horizons of evangelization and the urgent need to bear witness to the evangelical message to all without distinction, make up the field of your apostolate. So many are still waiting to know Jesus, the only Saviour of the human person, and there are plenty of situations of injustice and moral and material hardship that are a challenge for believers.

4. Such an urgent mission requires an unceasing personal and community conversion. Only hearts that are totally open to the action of grace can interpret the signs of the times and take up the appeals of a humanity in need of justice and peace. You can meet the needs of the people if you keep intact the spirit of St John Bosco and St Maria Domenica Mazzarello, who lived with their gaze fixed on heaven and a joyful heart even when the following of Christ involved obstacles and difficulties and apparent failures.

Dear Sisters, may your faithful loyalty to Christ and to his Gospel shine forth in the many areas of

your ecclesial service.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary whom you venerate with the lovely name of *Help of Christians,* protect and help you and be the sure guide of the course of your religious family, so that you may realize all your plans for the good of souls.

With these best wishes, while I assure you of my affectionate remembrance of each of you and of those you meet in your daily apostolate in prayer, I wholeheartedly bless you all.

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