



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE ORDER OF CLERICS REGULAR OF SOMASCA
ON THE 500th ANNIVERSARY OF THE PRODIGIOUS LIBERATION
OF THEIR FOUNDER ST JEROME EMILIANI**

To Reverend Father

FRANCO MOSCONE, C.R.S.

Superior General of the Order of Clerics Regular of Somasca

With great pleasure I learned that your Order is preparing to celebrate with a jubilee year the anniversary of a happy event that is important to its history and charism. September 27th, in fact, is the 500th anniversary of the prodigious liberation from prison, the work of Mary Most Holy, of your founder St Jerome Emiliani, universal patron of orphans and troubled youths: a miraculous event that at the same time changed the course of a human life and marked the beginning of an experience of consecrated life that is rather significant for the history of the Church.

The life of the Venetian layman, Jerome Emiliani, was as it were “refounded” on the night of 27 September 1511, when, after making a sincere vow to Our Lady of Treviso to change his behaviour, through the intercession of the Mother of God he found himself freed from the chains of prison, which he himself later presented at the altar of the Virgin.

“Dirupisti vincula mea” (Ps 116: 16). The verse of the Psalm expresses the genuine interior revolution that took place after that liberation, bound up with the tormented political events of that age. In fact, it represented an integral renewal of Jerome’s character: by divine intervention he was freed from the bonds of selfishness, pride, search for personal affirmation, so much so that his life, which had previously been dedicated primarily to temporal things, became oriented entirely to God, whom he loved and served particularly in the orphaned, the sick or abandoned young people.

Guided by events in his family, which caused him to become the guardian of all his orphaned

nephews, St Jerome matured in his realization that young people, especially those in difficult straits, could not remain alone, but needed one essential requirement for healthy growth, namely love. In him love was more important than ingenuity and because his was a love that flowed from the charity of God himself, it was filled with patience and understanding: attentive, tender and ready to sacrifice, like the love of a mother.

The Church of the 16th century, divided by the Protestant schism, and searching for a serious reform within itself, enjoyed a flowering of holiness that was the first and most original response to the demands for renewal. The witness of the saints says that it is necessary to trust in God alone: indeed, both personal and institutional trials serve to help faith grow. God has his plans, even if we do not manage to understand its provisions.

Attentiveness to young people and their human and Christian education, which is a distinguishing trait of the Somascans' charism, remains the Church's commitment in every time and place. It is necessary for the growth of the new generations to be nourished not only by cultural and technical ideas, but first and foremost by the love that overcomes individualism and selfishness and makes them attentive to the needs of every brother and sister, even when they receive nothing in exchange, or rather, especially in that case. The shining example of St Jerome Emiliani, whom Blessed John Paul II defined as a "lay animator of the laity", helps us to take to heart every form of poverty in our young people, whether moral, physical or existential, and especially the poverty of love, the root of every serious human problem.

The Virgin Mary, the incomparable model of faith and charity, will continue to guide us with her support. As she loosened the bonds of the chains that kept St Jerome a prisoner, in her motherly goodness she wants to continue to free people from the bonds of sin and from the prison of a life without love for God and one's brothers and sisters, offering the keys that open God's heart to us and our heart to God.

With these sentiments I impart to you, Reverend Father, to all the members of the Somasca family, and to all those who will join in faith in the jubilee celebrations, a special Apostolic Blessing.

From Castel Gandolfo, 20 July 2011

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