



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE SISTERS OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY

To the Reverend

Mother Gregoris Michels

*General Superior of the Sisters of
Christian Charity*

1. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you!" (II Cor 13,13). I am pleased to address you, dear Sisters of Christian Charity, assembled in Paderborn at the birthplace of your community, for the 21st General Chapter, with the words that the Apostle to the Nations addressed to the community in Corinth. I want to express my closeness especially to the Reverend Mother General who has guided the congregation in the two previous terms of office with great sacrifice and sensitivity and I ask her to convey my good wishes to all the members of the congregation.

The theme that you are concerned with in these days fills me with joy and gives me hope in view of the high ideals which you are discussing about your life. You have chosen an equally demanding and promising saying of your blessed foundress, Pauline von Mallinckrodt, upon which you want to base your deliberations: "To study Jesus". This topic has little to do with some kind of neutral "thing" about which people can discuss their thoughts, but is much more an invitation which personally involves you, as women of the consecrated life, and which you must take to heart.

I am happy that you do not see yourselves primarily as the heirs of a more than 150-year-old shining past, but that you want to prepare a path to the future which the Lord of History wants to travel with the religious of the third millennium.

2. "We want to see Jesus" (*Jn* 12,21). This is not simply a request made by some Greeks to the Apostle Philip almost 2,000 years ago. It also moves many of our contemporaries today who are seeking fulfilment and happiness. Even if they do not always know it, the people of our day are asking the faithful not only to speak about Christ, but most of all to show him to everyone: at the same time to "let them see" Christ. The man and women who have consecrated their life to God are called in a special way to fulfil this request.

3. At a time in which the declining numbers of religious gives cause for concern, it is all the more urgent for the religious

individually and as a community to draw from the sources of a strong and deep spirituality. What you do is, without a doubt important; however, of much greater importance is what you are: Sisters of Christian Charity.

Such a title is a demanding one. Your life should do honour to this name. I know that you make every effort to live faithfully day by day the Lord's "new commandment", loving one another as he has loved us (cf. *Jn* 13,34). You let yourselves be guided by the firm conviction that there is no genuine and workable community without the necessary mutual love. This includes the readiness to serve by using all one's energies, a readiness to accept one's sister without judgement, just as she is; a willingness to forgive "seventy times seven" times (cf. *Mt* 18,21); a desire to judge no one (cf. *Mt* 7,1ff.); the intention to keep beginning anew.

4. Indeed, the love of God has been poured out into your hearts through the Holy Spirit (cf. *Rom* 5,5), so that one of your tasks is to become more and more "of one heart and mind" (*Acts* 4,32). From this grows almost spontaneously the need to hold everything in common: all your material resources and your spiritual experiences, your spiritual gifts and your practical skills, your apostolic ideals and your charitable deeds: "In community living the power of the Spirit existing in one person is also extended to the others. Therefore, one should not rejoice over his or her own gifts, but rather multiply them, so as to let others share in them, and enjoy the fruits of the gifts of the others as one's own" (Basil the Great, *The Greater Religious Rules, Questions, 7: PG* 31, 931).

5. If you, dear sisters, are reflecting on your being and mission in the century that has just begun, then I would like to express a wish for your journey that the leitmotiv of your deliberations be Christian charity. May your treatment of one another be filled with reverence and respect; may your conversations, conducted in an awareness of your great responsibility, help you to direct your footsteps courageously along the paths which the Lord has planned for your congregation; last of all, may your community increasingly become an icon of divine love, in which everyone who looks at it may recognize the greatness and goodness of our loving God.

6. In lingering contemplation of the face of Christ, your community will also be a light in dark hours, and your countenances will be as if they are shining because of your knowledge of the divine countenance that shines in your hearts (cf. *II Cor* 4,6). Through the intercession of Mary, the Immaculate Mother of God, whose life was a perfect reflection of divine love, I express my wish for the success of your General Chapter and I cordially impart to the capitulars and to all the Sisters of Christian Charity my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 2 July 2001

JOHN PAUL II