



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

*To Mr José Ramón Díaz-Torremocha
President of the St Vincent de Paul Society*

1. On the occasion of the meeting of the *St Vincent de Paul Society's International Coordinating Committee*, I am pleased to greet you, and through you to greet the members of the *International Coordinating Committee* and those of the *International General Council*. You represent an eminent form of charity that is carried out on all the continents, the service of the poor which, as Monsieur Vincent liked to recall, is a way of serving Christ. Through its daily efforts, your association is a constant reminder to the Church of her vocation to show Christ's preferential love for the poor.

2. During the Jubilee of the Incarnation, "the Church's joy was great this year, as she devoted herself to contemplating the face of her Bridegroom and Lord" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 1).

This contemplation fills the Church's life, prayer and action, inviting her to make her own the tender, compassionate look of Christ, who reminds every person of the value of his dignity and his unique place in God's heart: "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor 8: 9). The spiritual life and apostolic activity of your precursor, Frédéric Ozanam, whom I had the joy of beatifying in Paris in 1997, were deeply marked by this contemplation of Christ's face in the poor.

Such a spiritual attitude is essential for your apostolic efforts and the enthusiasm of the conferences. I therefore encourage you in your personal contact with the poor always to be witnesses to charity as well as to justice, contributing to the individual's overall development, after the example of your founder.

3. "Love is endlessly inventive". These words of St Vincent marvellously express this reality in the

Church: the Spirit inspires many charisms, so that Christian communities will be the sign of the infinite kindness of our Father in heaven. By making your specific contribution to the mission of the particular Churches, "in full harmony ... and in obedience to the authoritative directives of the Pastors" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 46), you are helping to build a society based on love and solidarity. By active collaboration with the various local agencies coordinating the apostolate of charity, you are realizing the deep desire that set the heart of Bl. Ozanam on fire: to embrace the whole world with charity. In this spirit of unity, the international associations of the lay faithful are called to be properly integrated into the ecclesial fabric; this is why the Church offers different forms of juridical recognition, while respecting legitimate charisms and differences. It is to be hoped that the St Vincent de Paul Society, with a history of over 100 years, will continue its reflection with the competent authorities in the Dioceses and in the Holy See, especially with the Pontifical Council for the Laity, in order to harmonize its institutional foundations and practice with its ecclesial nature as an international association of the lay faithful who seek holiness in the service of the poor.

4. As I stressed in my recent Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, the time has come for a "new 'creativity' in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by 'getting close' to those who suffer" (n. 50). I ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to help you constantly to find new ways to love the poor, so that the whole Church will live this charity each day from close at hand, and I affectionately give you my Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to all the members and friends of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

From the Vatican, 14 February 2001.