



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE GENERALATE OF
THE SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE WORD**

Monday, 19 December 1988

Dear Brothers in Christ,

1. It is with particular joy that I welcome you, the members of the Generalate of the Society of the Divine Word. Through you I greet all the members of the Society, on whom I invoke grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ his Son.

Your Institute has recently celebrated its thirteenth General Chapter and you are also commemorating one hundred years of the Society's presence in the Eternal City. Through the Chapter the Society renewed its foundational commitment to missionary work in that foremost of all senses, obedience to Christ's command to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations". As the one entrusted with a special solicitude for all the Churches, it is a great joy for me to know that the members of the Society are engaged in specifically missionary activity in so many parts of the world. Be assured that the support of my prayers and encouragement reaches out to each member of your community, no matter how near or far.

2. Through your religious charism you are privileged to take part in the saving mission entrusted by Christ to the Church. As Divine Word missionaries you place emphasis on the worldwide dimension of this mission. You identify yourselves with the frontier situations of the local Churches, building up Christian communities where they do not yet exist and accompanying them in their growth until they can be sustained by their own strength and vitality. Your task is to bring the truth of Christ into a saving and redemptive dialogue with local cultures and traditions.

Undoubtedly this kind of apostolate was at the base of the great vision which animated your Blessed Founder Arnold at the beginning of your religious and missionary existence. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he well understood the missionary nature of the Church and did not hesitate to promote this missionary awareness in his contemporaries. He showed himself open to different

cultures and allowed his spiritual sons to pursue the study of new sciences that proved very useful for effective missionary activity. It has been in a special way through the endeavours of Father Wilhelm Schmid, a member of your Institute, that the Church has at her disposal an extensive knowledge of cultural anthropology, so necessary for an effective evangelization of peoples of different cultural backgrounds. These sciences are important tools of your ecclesial service.

3. However, as your General Chapter also brought out, the members of the Society of the Divine Word are above all heralds of our Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be able to proclaim the Good News effectively only if you listen to the word of God and live it in your daily lives. The word of God – the divine word – must continue to be the focal point of your spirituality, the object of your daily prayer and meditation, so that it can be the source of your joy and fruitfulness. To use the words of John the Evangelist, the Incarnate Word must become for you something you have seen with your eyes, something you have looked upon and touched with your hands.

To achieve this kind of unity with the Word, you must be radically open to the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit of God who moved the prophets, who was present at the Incarnation of the Word and who, at Pentecost, opened the way of the Gospel to the world. Today, the same Spirit moves and guides the messengers of the Good News of salvation.

4. With great joy I have learnt that this year the Society had one hundred and seventeen newly ordained missionaries. You are blessed with numerous vocations, especially in Poland, India, Indonesia and the Philippines. Young missionaries from these countries are being sent to different continents to evangelize and to build new Christian communities. Other countries that in recent years have undergone a vocational crisis begin to show new signs of hope. This fact spurs us to give thanks to the Lord for his goodness and to pray more intensely that he send many worthy labourers into his vineyard.

The vocations that God is sending to you come from different cultures and often from Churches which not very long ago were themselves missionary Christian communities. In the design of God, this is an important factor in the life of your Society, and it requires great attention and reflection on your part. As a community of priests and brothers from different nations and languages, you can become ever more a living symbol of the unity and diversity of the Church

5. On the happy occasion of this meeting I wish to exhort you and all the members of the Society of the Divine Word, individually and collectively, to remain faithful to your specific vocation, joyfully participating in the Church's missionary task. Under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom you venerate as the Immaculate Spouse of the Holy Spirit, and through the intercession of your Blessed Founder Arnold and Blessed Joseph Freinademetz, may you continue to labour in the Lord's harvest with wise counsel and generous dedication. From my heart I impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing.

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