



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO YOUNG RELIGIOUS**

Tuesday, 30 September 1997

Dear Young Consecrated Men and Women,

1. It is a great comfort for me to meet you, gathered here in Rome from all over the world, on the occasion of the International Congress of Young Religious. I greet Cardinal Eduardo Martínez Somalo, Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, and I thank him for the cordial words which he has just addressed to me on behalf of you all. I greet Fr Camilo Maccise and Mother Giuseppina Fragasso, Presidents respectively of the Union of Superiors and the Union of Superiors General. They organized today's meeting, which, for the first time, at a significant moment in the history of the Church and of consecrated life, gathers young people from many religious families. I address my greetings to the superiors and superiors general of the various institutes represented here.

I offer you special greetings, dear young consecrated men and women. Some of you have conveyed the sentiments of all, and have shown me the expectations and generous desires that enliven your youth consecrated to God and to the Church. Your presence here, so numerous and festive, cannot fail to recall the image, still fresh in my mind and dear to my heart, of the 12th World Youth Day celebrated in Paris last August. Like that enthusiastic crowd of young people, you represent, through consecration to God who "*gladdens our youth*", the rich and exalting manifestation of the spirit's perennial vitality. One could say that young people are now in fashion: young people in Paris, young people last Saturday in Bologna. We will now see in Brazil, in Rio de Janeiro.

2. I note with pleasure a motif of continuity between the Paris event and the present Congress, happily highlighted by the themes of the two meetings. In fact, if the World Youth Day's theme was

suggested by the words from John's Gospel: "*Teacher, where are you staying?*" "*Come and see*" (Jn 1:38-39), the theme of your congress indicates the acceptance of Jesus' invitation to the disciples. This culminated in the paschal proclamation of the decisive discovery of the Risen One: "*We have seen the Lord*" (Jn 20:25).

Before the world you are privileged witnesses of this formidable truth: *the Lord is risen and makes himself the traveling companion of the pilgrim man on life's ways, until the paths of time cross the way of the Eternal One, when "we shall see him as he is"* (1 Jn 3:2).

Consecrated life *thus has a prophetic charism* because it extends between the experience of "having seen the Lord" and the certain hope of seeing him again "as he is". It is a journey that you have begun and it will gradually lead you to take on the same sentiments as Christ Jesus (cf. Phil 2:5). Let the Father, through the Spirit's action, form in your hearts and minds the same sentiments of his Son. You are called to vibrate with his passion for the kingdom, and like him, to offer your energy, your time, your youth and your life for the Father and for the brothers and sisters. In this way you will learn true wisdom of life.

This wisdom, dear young people, is the savour of God's mystery and the taste of divine intimacy, but it is also the beauty of being together in his name; it is the experience of a chaste, poor and obedient life, lived for his glory; it is love for the little ones and for the poor, and the transfiguration of life in the light of the Beatitudes. This is the secret of the joy of so many religious, a joy unknown to the world, and which you have the *duty to communicate to your brothers and sisters* through the shining witness of your consecration.

3. Dear men and women religious, what spiritual riches there are in your history! What a precious heritage you have in your hands! But remember that all this was given to you not only for your perfection, but also that you put it at the disposal of the Church and of humanity, that it might be a cause of wisdom and happiness for everyone.

This is what St Theresa of Lisieux did, with her "way of spiritual childhood", which is a true theology of love. Young like you, she succeeded in transmitting to so many souls the beauty of trust and abandonment in God, of the simplicity of Gospel childhood, of intimacy with the Lord, from which fraternal communion and service to neighbour spontaneously spring. The simple but great Theresa of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face will be proclaimed Doctor of the Church precisely for this reason: because with the "theology of the heart" *she was able to indicate*, in terms accessible to all, *a sure way on which to seek God and to meet him*.

This is also the experience of many of your brothers and sisters of the past and the present. They have known how to incarnate, in silence and in a hidden life, the typically apostolic soul of religious life, and in particular, the extraordinary capacity of consecrated persons to combine the intensity of contemplation and love of God with the fervour of love for the poor and needy, and for all who are

frequently marginalized and rejected by the world.

4. Your congress *is not only a meeting of young people and for young religious, it is a prophetic proclamation and witness* for all. You have come from every part of the world to reflect on the central themes of the consecrated life: vocation, spirituality, communion and mission. Moreover, you intend to share your experiences in a context of prayer and joyous fraternity. In this way, the consecrated life shines forth vividly as part of the Church's ever youthful spirit.

Because you are many and young, you offer a vibrant and contemporary image of the consecrated life. Certainly, we are all aware of the challenges which face that life, especially in certain countries. Among these are the ageing of men and women religious, the reorganization of apostolates, the diminishing presence and the numeric drop in vocations. However, I am convinced that the Holy Spirit will not cease to stir up and encourage in many young people such as yourselves the call to total dedication to God in the traditional forms of the religious life, as well as in forms that are new and original.

5. Dear friends, I thank you for coming to see me. By your enthusiasm and your joy, even more by your age, you rejuvenate the Church. I would like you to read in my heart the affection and esteem I have for each one of you. *The Pope loves you*, he trusts in you, he prays for you and he is sure that you will be capable, not only of remembering and telling the glorious history which has preceded you, but also of continuing to build it in the future which the Holy Spirit is preparing for you (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 110).

As we prepare, in the context of preparations for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, to enter the year of the Holy Spirit, we entrust the great gift of the consecrated life precisely to the Spirit of the Father and the Son. We include all those who generously dedicate themselves throughout the world to following the poor, chaste and obedient Christ. Let us invoke the intercession of the holy founders and foundresses of your orders and congregations; let us especially implore the help of Mary, the consecrated Virgin.

6. Mary, young daughter of Israel, you who immediately said "yes" to the Father's proposal, make these young people attentive and obedient to God's will. You who lived virginity as a total acceptance of divine love, make them discover the beauty and freedom of a virginal life. You who possessed nothing to be enriched only by God and his Word, free their hearts from every worldly attachment, so that the kingdom of God may be their only treasure, their only passion.

Young daughter of Zion, who remained ever virgin in your heart filled with love for God, keep in them and in all of us the perennial youthfulness of spirit and of love. Virgin of sorrows, who stood at the foot of your Son's Cross, generate in each one of your children, as in the Apostle John, love that is stronger than death. Virgin Mother of the Risen One, make us all witnesses to the joy of Christ who lives for ever.

I bless you all from my heart.

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