



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE INSTITUTE OF CHARITY (ROSMINIANS)**

26 September 1998

Dear Father General,

Dear Brothers in Christ, "I give thanks to God for you because of the grace of God you have received in Christ Jesus, enriching you with all speech and knowledge. . . so that you lack no spiritual gift" (1 Cor 1:4-7). Echoing the Apostle, I welcome you, the sons of Antonio Rosmini, who abounded so wonderfully in the spiritual gifts which God continues to give the Church through the Institute of Charity. The General Chapter must signify for all Rosminians a time of profound personal and community renewal in the charism bequeathed to you by your Founder. Antonio Rosmini lived through a time of turbulence which was not just political, but intellectual and religious as well. It was a time when the cry for liberation rang out and when the question of freedom dominated all others. Often enough, this was understood as a rejection of the Church and an abandonment of Christian faith, implying a liberation from Jesus Christ himself. In the midst of this turmoil, Antonio Rosmini saw that there could be no liberation *from* Christ but only liberation *by* Christ and *for* Christ; and this insight inspired his whole life and work, and lies at the heart of his extensive writings, which are at one and the same time scientific and religious, philosophical and mystical. Your Founder stands firmly in that great intellectual tradition of Christianity which knows that there is no opposition between faith and reason, but that one demands the other. His was a time when the long process of the separation of faith and reason had reached full term, and the two came to seem mortal enemies. Rosmini, however, insisted with Saint Augustine that "believers are also thinkers: in believing they think and in thinking, they believe... If faith does not think, it is nothing" (*De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*, 2, 5). He knew that faith without reason withers into myth and superstition; and therefore he set about applying his immense gifts of mind not only to theology and spirituality, but to fields as diverse as philosophy, politics, law, education, science, psychology and art, seeing in them no threat to faith but necessary allies. Rosmini seems at times a man of contradiction. Yet we find in him a deep and mysterious convergence; and it was this convergence which ensured that, although very much a man of the nineteenth century, Rosmini transcended his own time and place to become a universal witness,

whose teaching is still today both relevant and timely. Although his intellectual energy was astonishing, Rosmini set at the heart of his Christian life what he called “the principle of passivity”. This meant that he consciously and consistently renounced all self-will in the search for the one thing which mattered – the will of God. For a man so active by nature, this required a costly and never ending *kenosis*. His “principle of passivity” was firmly based on faith in the workings of God’s Providence, so that the “passivity” in question appears more as a constant watchfulness for signs of God’s will and an absolute readiness to act upon such signs when they appear. What was true of his own life was to be true of the Institute which he founded. His trust in the goodness of Providence led him to write in your Constitutions: “This Institute is grounded upon one sole foundation, the Providence of God the Father Almighty; and whoever wants to replace it with another seeks to destroy the Institute” (*Constitutions*, 462). Even in times of great suffering, your Founder never lost faith in God’s love and therefore never lost his peace of soul or his sure grasp of what Saint Paul means when he urges constant rejoicing (cf. Phil 4:4). It was this paradoxical experience of both suffering and joy which led Rosmini to revere more and more deeply the mystery of the Cross, since in the figure of the Crucified Christ he found the One who knew both the absolute joy of the beatific vision and the full measure of human suffering. The Cross had been central to Rosmini from his earliest days; and it was not by chance that the Institute of Charity was founded on Monte Calvario in Domodossola. Indeed, it is only in the mystery of the Cross that all the seeming contradictions of Rosmini come to a point of grand convergence and we sense the full force of what he meant by “charity”. For him, it was the Cross which warned reason against a proud self-sufficiency, just as it warned faith against the decay which lay in wait once reason was abandoned. It was the Cross which taught the truth of God’s Providence and what it means to be “passive” before its workings. It was the Cross which turned charity into a blazing fire of compassion and self-sacrifice. This is why he wrote of the Institute of Charity that “the Cross of Jesus is our treasure, our knowledge, our everything” (*Letters*). As the Church prepares to enter the Third Christian Millennium, the evangelization of culture is a crucial part of what I have called “the new evangelization”, and it is at this point that the Church looks eagerly to the sons of Antonio Rosmini. Today’s dominant culture worships freedom and autonomy, while often following false paths which lead to new forms of slavery. Our culture sways between rationalism and fideism in many guises, seemingly unable to find a harmony between faith and reason. Christians are sometimes tempted to miss the point of the *kenosis* of the Cross of Jesus Christ, preferring instead the ways of pride, power and dominion. In such a context, the Institute of Charity has a specific mission to teach the path of freedom, wisdom and truth, which is always the way of charity and the way of the Cross. This is your religious and cultural vocation, no less than it was the vocation of your far-seeing Founder. Rosmini’s mysticism of the Cross led him to a deep devotion to the woman who stands at the foot of the Cross, *Maria Addolorata*. In Mary, he found one who was wounded by sorrow but wounded also by love, one who could both weep and rejoice with her Son, and who would teach the Church to do the same. From Mary, Rosmini learnt the meaning of the mysterious words which he spoke on his death-bed: “Adore, keep silence, rejoice”. May she who is the Mother of Sorrows and Mother of all our joys lead the sons and daughters of Antonio Rosmini now and always into the silence of adoration, where the peace of Easter reigns and the mind and heart find rest. Invoking upon the Chapter members and all the members of the Institute of Charity the grace of the Risen Lord, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing. Copyright 1998 © Libreria Editrice Vaticana