



The Holy See

***SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER
JOHN PAUL II
TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE ORDER OF ST BASIL THE GREAT***

Saturday, 8 July 2000

Dear Fathers of the Basilian Order!

1. You have gathered in the Eternal City for the work of your General Chapter. I joyfully welcome you to this special meeting which you requested to confirm, in this way as well, your communion with the See of Peter. In expressing my gratitude to you for this sign of ecclesial charity, I extend a cordial greeting to your Protoarchimandrite Dionysius Lachovicz.

The purpose of your Chapter is to renew the order's statutes, to elect the new General Curia and to prepare sound guidelines for solving the order's current problems. For many of your communities' members, it has only been 10 years since their liberation from the oppressive regimes which severely impeded the life of the Church. This event also coincides with the Great Jubilee year, that is, with a time when we are called in a very particular way to a purification of memory, to forgiveness, in a word, to reconciliation. Those who have suffered so deeply are especially called to a love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13: 7).

Such love leads to reconciliation with our brethren, especially those who have been responsible for unspeakable sufferings.

May the Holy Year 2000 be a powerful call for you all to holiness in personal and community life, so that its beneficial effects may spread to the entire Christian community.

2. May the unity of the Church, for which Christ prayed at the Last Supper (cf. Jn 17: 20, 21), be a constant commitment for each of you. Your example in this task is St Basil the Great, of whom I wrote: "It was the same love for Christ and his Gospel that made him suffer so much because of the divisions in the Church and made him seek, so perseveringly,

hoping against hope for a more effective and manifest communion with all the Churches" (Apostolic Letter *Patres Ecclesiae*, II, 2 January 1980; *Insegnamenti*, III/1, 1980, p. 58).

Another primary purpose of your consecration to God in the Basilian Order is the Christian renewal of your people, a goal for which St Josaphat, whose mortal remains now rest here in St Peter's Basilica, laboured so much. We are approaching the 400th anniversary of his entry into the monastery of the Most Holy Trinity in Vilnius. The dawn of a new springtime of monastic life in the Greek Catholic Church dates back to that time. With his spiritual asceticism, his life of penance, his tireless service to the Church, he made an effective contribution to the rebirth not only of monasticism but also of the Christian life in those lands. An analogous situation is recurring today wherever the Church was suppressed for many decades. Today too, those peoples are waiting to see the light of God which is reflected in the faces of men transfigured by prayer, love and service.

The unity of the Church today needs a creative fidelity (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 37) that can draw on the great and very rich spiritual tradition of the Christian East. This tradition is waiting to be restored in all your communities: it is up to you to be the faithful witnesses to this multifaceted spiritual heritage.

3. St Basil the Great, your patriarch, begins his "Great Rules" with a forceful appeal to the precept of love for God and neighbour. From this flows all the dynamism of the subsequent monastic norms and the path itself to holiness. Love is expressed in a community life inspired by the model of the first community in Jerusalem, which fully shared all its possessions and charisms (cf. *Acts* 2: 42-47). This principle was appealed to by your fathers, Metropolitan Joseph Velamin Rutski and St Josaphat Kuntsevych, who renewed the life of your order.

Your service to ecumenism must be based on a deep interior conversion to Jesus Christ and his Gospel. This presupposes an intense devotion to prayer, "which transforms our lives with light and truth and makes us icons of Christ" (*Address at the Church of the Basilian Fathers in Warsaw*, 11 June 1999, n. 4). Only through humble contemplation of the Holy Face of our Redeemer can we be reconciled to one another and rediscover the full unity that is born of love.

The liturgy, the summit and centre of all Christian life, has particular importance on this journey. With all its riches, it must be your constant reference-point. A fidelity to the heritage of the past that knows how to be open to a healthy creativity according to the great spirit of the liturgical prayers will guarantee perseverance in your Eastern religious identity.

4. Your charism is based on several essential points: community life, a clear witness to Gospel life, service to the unity of Christ's Church expressed in study, example and especially personal and liturgical prayer, and a varied apostolate for the People of God through spiritual formation and pastoral, catechetical, missionary, academic and publishing activities. St Basil himself "was able to balance wisely indefatigable preaching with periods of solitude and frequent recourse to interior prayer. He regarded this, in fact, as absolutely necessary for the 'purification of the soul', so that the proclamation of the word might always be confirmed by the 'evident example' of life. In this way he became a pastor and was at the same time, in the real sense of the term, a monk" (Apostolic Letter *Patres Ecclesiae*, II, pp. 53-54).

As I express grateful appreciation to the outgoing father consultors, offering those who will be elected in their place my best wishes for their work, I extend a special greeting to the representatives of the Provinces of Argentina, Brazil,

Canada, Poland, Romania, the United States, Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary and the recent foundation in Prague. I entrust everyone to the motherly intercession of the Virgin Most Holy, and, with a fraternal thought for Fr Protoarchimandrite, I wholeheartedly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to everyone.

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