



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE PARTICIPANTS
IN THE 25th CONFERENCE OF THE BISHOP FRIENDS
OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT**

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate!*

1. I am pleased to offer you my cordial greeting on the occasion of your spiritual conference for the friends of the Focolare Movement, taking place these days at the Mariapolis Centre in Castel Gandolfo. Thank you for today's visit, an expression of the ecclesial communion that unites you to the Successor of Peter.

You have gathered for shared reflection, based on reports, experiences and testimonies, on the stimulating theme: *"Christ Crucified and Abandoned, Root of the Church as Communion"*. While expressing my deep appreciation of this initiative, which is taking place for the 25th time, I encourage you to be guided by the indications I gave in the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*. In it, in fact, I invite the entire Christian people to set their gaze firmly on the face of the crucified and risen Christ and to deepen their knowledge of the mystery of suffering and love from which the Church as communion is born and is constantly renewed as a living icon of the Holy Trinity.

2. In the cross of Christ we find the true source of salvation, the supreme revelation of God's love and the profound root of communion with God and among us. In Jesus' agony on the cross, which appears as the moment when darkness and evil triumphed, it is actually the victory of Christ that is accomplished through his obedient love for the Father and his solidarity with men, prisoners of sin.

In the Apostolic Letter mentioned above, I wrote in this regard: "Jesus' cry on the cross is not the cry of anguish of a man without hope, but the prayer of the Son who offers his life to the Father in love, for the salvation of all. At the very moment when he identifies with our sin, 'abandoned' by

the Father, he "abandons' himself into the hands of the Father" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 26).

Therefore evil and sin are definitively defeated in Christ crucified and abandoned, and the full unity of mankind with the Father and of human beings with each other becomes possible. According to the words of the Evangelist John, inspired by an earlier oracle of the prophet Zechariah, men "shall look on him whom they have pierced" (Jn 19: 37). This convergence on the cross is directed by Christ to the Father, in order to form around him a new community of love. We shall truly never exhaust the depths of this great mystery (cf. *Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 25)!

3. Love for Christ crucified, contemplated in the climax of suffering and abandonment, is the high road not only for making the communion of the ecclesial structure ever more real at all levels, but also for opening a fruitful dialogue with other cultures and religions. To this end, the spiritual themes, theological reflections and testimonies which you are sharing in these days will be of great help to you.

From contemplating the face of the abandoned, crucified Christ important consequences will certainly result, prompting you to live in depth the great mystery of the communion contained and revealed in it: "If we have truly contemplated the face of Christ", I wrote in the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* mentioned above, "our pastoral planning will necessarily be inspired by the 'new commandment' which he gave us. 'Love one another, as I have loved you' (Jn 13: 34)" (n. 42).

In the historical transition that we are experiencing, you have a difficult mission before you: to make the Church the place where we live and the school where the mystery of God's love is taught. How will this be possible without rediscovering an authentic spirituality of communion? It is necessary first of all to see with the eyes of the heart the Trinitarian mystery present within us, in order to know how to recognize it in the faces of others. A brother in faith should be regarded as one who belongs to us in the mysterious unity of the Mystical Body. Only by making room for my brother, by acknowledging what is positive in him, can I understand how much he is a gift for me (cf. *Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 43). Thus lived, the spirituality of unity and communion that characterizes your Movement will not fail to bear abundant fruits of renewal for all believers.

4. Venerable and dear Brothers! You offer the contribution of your experience and pastoral ministry to the study and reflection of these days. Thanks be to God, you yourselves are witnesses to the fruits of mutual understanding and close cooperation that are growing in the Church as a result of the efforts made by the various Movements. May you yourselves be its generous and responsible leaders.

May you know how to make this conference a fitting occasion to grow in this dimension, in the spirit of the effective and affective collegiality which must characterize your mission. From mutual love you will draw reasons for encouragement, renewed strength and firm hope. With these

sentiments and wishes, I invoke the constant protection of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Unity, on each of you, on your ecclesial communities and on all your loved ones, as I affectionately give you a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 14 February 2001.