



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF NAZARETH

Wednesday, 6 July 2001

Dear Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth,

1. I cordially greet you on the occasion of this meeting which takes place during the 21st General Chapter of your Congregation. I extend a special greeting to your Mother General, Sr Maria Teresa Jasionowicz.

You represent your eight religious provinces that embrace 15 countries, where you carry out your apostolic activity. You have come to Rome, to the Motherhouse and to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, to reflect with a sense of responsibility on the actual situation of the Congregation and to prepare the future. In this perspective, you intend to adapt your Constitutions and elect a new General Government.

2. In the "Message to Consecrated Persons" which I gave to religious communities at the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa, on 4 June 1997, I recalled that "we live in times of chaos, of spiritual disorientation and confusion, in which we discern various liberal and secularizing tendencies; God is often openly banished from social life ... and in people's moral conduct a harmful relativism creeps in. Religious indifference spreads. The new evangelization is an impelling need of the moment.... The Church expects you to dedicate yourselves with all your strength ... to stand up against the greatest temptation of our times: the denial of the God of Love" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 18 June 1997, p. 7).

Today's world carries with it many threats. Such is the experience of men and women, married couples, young people, children.... The most threatened, however, seems to be the family! We must not lose heart. The more numerous the dangers are, the greater is our need for faith, hope and charity with prayer and the witness of a Christian life. Your Congregation wants to offer an

evangelical response to the restlessness of contemporary man. I rejoice to know that during your chapter work you plan to reread your religious charism in the optic of the new evangelization.

3. Your Foundress, Bl. Franciszka Siedliska, Maria of Jesus the Good Shepherd, whom I proclaimed Blessed on 23 April 1989, gave your community, as a model of life, the life of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Rightly I invite you to form yourselves after the example of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. She loved to characterize the Incarnation of the Son of God and the hidden life of Jesus in the mystery of the Holy Family as the kingdom of divine Love.

Forming a religious community of love, help families to resist "the greatest temptation of our time", the denial of the God of Love. Help families to open themselves to Christ! This will be possible to the extent that prayer life and your witness will be filtered by caring for the family. May families, thanks to your service, rediscover the model for their own lives and conduct in the Family of Nazareth. May you be strengthened by the example of your Blessed sisters, the 11 martyrs of Nowogròdek, who during World War II offered their lives for the liberation from prison of certain fathers of families, living in that area. I am delighted to have been able to elevate them to the glories of the altar during the celebrations of the Great Jubilee of 2000, 5 March. May the testimony of your life and fidelity to the charism sustain the work of evangelization and building the Kingdom of the Love of God in families.

4. The theme of the work of your General Chapter is: *The law of love as the call to the total gift of self to God*. For many years you have been seeking to correspond to this call through your apostolate, in which you strive to cooperate with Christ and with his Church. Bear witness to the law of love in your communities and especially in service to families who need spiritual and material help, in consultation and in pastoral family care, in zealous service to the sick, to the handicapped, in parish work, in schools, in educational centres, in homes for single mothers, among the homeless, children and people who are lost and unwanted.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation for this apostolate of love. It is the most effective proclamation of Christ to our world and the concrete realization of your religious charism. I entrust to you, dear Sisters who have come here, this Message so that you communicate it to all your communities. I pray to the Lord that the leaders of the Congregation, elected during the Chapter, receive the new challenges, in the spirit of its directives, so that your charism, the kingdom of the Love of God, will shine with an even greater splendour in your communities, in the Church and in the world. May it remain the clear reflection of that "Love that has visited us from on high" (cf. Lk 1,78)!

5. In the apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* I addressed this exhortation to all the faithful: *Duc in altum - put out into the deep!* Today with these words I invite your community "to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (cf. n. 1). In the spirit of

this exhortation, I pray to God that the grace of your religious vocation will bear abundant spiritual fruits.

I impart a heartfelt Apostolic Benediction to the Superior General, to the participants in the Chapter and to the whole community of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth.