



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE CONGREGATION OF THE HOSPITAL SISTERS OF MERCY

*To Reverend Mother Sister Aurelia Damiani
Superior General of the Congregation of the Hospital Sisters of Mercy*

1. I am pleased to address a cordial thought to you and your Sisters as you observe your 42nd General Chapter, that sees you involved in a harmonious search for the will of God for your institute at this special time in history, the beginning of a new millennium.

I wish to express my fatherly gratitude to all the Hospital Sisters of Mercy who carry out their Mission in Italy and in other nations. How valuable dear Sisters, is the service you offer to so many persons in need, performed with great pastoral zeal. How praiseworthy is your mission! Working in the world of the hospital, you bring relief to the sick and the suffering and for them you are the witness of the divine mercy that provides. Always keep alive this special charism, sealed by the bond of a special vow.

Christ sends you as his witnesses of "creativity in charity" to the world of the hospital

2. Every day, at the bedside of the sick and in your contact with their families and with health-care personnel, you have a chance to bring to each one an eloquent Gospel witness in full fidelity to Christ's mandate: *"Go into the world, preach the kingdom of God and heal the sick"* (cf. Lk 9,1-2).

This is one of the more urgent forms of evangelization, and, as you had the opportunity of reaffirming during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and now during this Chapter, your religious family intends to devote itself to this form, exploring the meaning and practical ways of carrying out your mission. You will thus exercise the "'creativity' in charity" which I expounded in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, recommending that it be carried out "not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by "getting close' to those who suffer" (n. 50). The theme of the Chapter fits into this perspective: *"Rooted in charity, to live and witness to the Mercy of Christ, the Good*

Samaritan of all times and all cultures".

By word and example, you must assure your brothers and sisters in need that *"apart from the mercy of God there is no other source of hope for mankind"* (John Paul II, *Homily at the Mass for the consecration of the Shrine of Divine Mercy at Kraków-Łagiewniki*, 17 August 2002, n. 1; *ORE*, 21 August 2002, p. 6).

3. You have lived your whole history along these lines from the beginning when you were founded to nurse the sick in the Papal States. Indeed, recognizing the urgent needs of the time, Princess Teresa Orsini in Doria Pamphilj, assisted by Cardinal Giuseppe Antonio Sala and under the aegis of Pope Pius VII, founded your congregation in the Hospital of St John in Rome. With you I thank the Lord who, through his Spirit, brought forth your institute in the Church to serve Christ in the sick, and I wish to encourage you to live up to this commitment of love and fidelity to God and to the Church, bringing to life in today's situation your specific, distinguishing charism that is a gift for society as a whole.

The challenge of inculturation today requires that believers proclaim the Good News in language and ways that the people of our time can understand. An urgent mission and vast apostolic horizons also unfold before you, dear Hospital Sisters of Mercy. From a discerning attention to the modern social and cultural realities will spring the concrete directions for making the presence of your institute more effective in the sector of health care and, at the same time, ready to identify more suitable methods of apostolic activity.

Always keep before your eyes the suffering face of Christ. Every day set out from him with humble courage to be witnesses to his merciful love in the vast field of sickness and suffering. As I wrote in the Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* which I quoted earlier, "it is not therefore a matter of inventing a 'new programme'. The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself" (n. 29).

4. I well know, Reverend Mother, how precious is the work of those who serve the sick daily, and I realize how many difficulties they have to face. You will find the strength to overcome them all if you strive to see Christ in every person. For this reason, the spiritual tension can never be absent from your difficult apostolic activity. You should therefore live your day in intense and watchful prayer. May contemplation sustain your action.

Mary, our Mother of Mercy, is the model in whom you will find inspiration, she is an image of living obedience to God's will. I entrust your General Chapter to her, so that wise and courageous decisions for the entire institute may result from it: decisions that you should make with your gaze fixed on the face of Christ.

With these sentiments, I cordially impart to you and to your Council, to the Chapter and to all the

Hospital Sisters of Mercy a special Apostolic Blessing.

From Castel Gandolfo, 14 September 2002

IOANNES PAULUS II

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