



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE SISTERS OF THE POOR OF ST CATHERINE OF SIENA

Friday, 11 April 2003

Dear Sisters of the Poor,

1. I greet you with joy on the occasion of the General Chapter of your Institute. I cordially welcome each and every one of you, with a special thought for the Superior General and her Council. I extend my greeting to the whole of your religious Family, which strives to spread the Gospel of charity, especially among the poor.

For Orders and Congregations every chapter meeting is an important time of reflection in which to gather momentum for spiritual and missionary action since, in a certain way, it is a return in spirit to their own origins which will enable them to set out more courageously towards further apostolic goals.

This is also what you intended to do in this General Chapter, dear Sisters, open to the inspiration of the Spirit and attentive to the "signs" of the times. The rich charismatic heritage that Bl. Savina Petrilli has handed down to you represents a providential "talent" to be fruitfully expended in the Church and for the world.

2. Your Foundress, whom the Lord has allowed me to beatify 15 years ago, was consecrated to God and dedicated to her neediest brothers and sisters, inspired by the four great loves of St Catherine: the Eucharist, the Crucified One, the Church and the Poor. Ever ready to attend to the needs of her brethren, she did not hesitate 100 years ago to go to the continent of Latin America. Following her shining trail, her spiritual daughters then extended the congregation's presence to Asia as well.

The theme of the General Chapter: *"A gift to give, the charismatic face of the Sister of the Poor"*,

stresses the urgent need to carry on this spiritual and missionary action without ever losing sight of the charismatic insight of Bl. Savina Petrilli. "Being Sisters of the Poor", she observed, "involves the commitment never to abandon "those poor whom God gives us as brothers and sisters" (*Directory*, p. 15), because "they must be dear to us and we must devote to them our special preference, our good will, our hearts, all our faculties and our work" (*ibid.*, p. 1006). This love, Bl. Savina added, "will be our glory and the source from which heavenly blessings for the Institute will always flow, since those who have compassion on the poor attract the Lord's favour" (*ibid.*, p. 1007).

3. Recognizing in the face of every poor person the face of Christ: it is this teaching that your Foundress repeats to you today, recalling, as she often did with the first sisters, that "nothing is too much for Jesus", and "the human heart can resist everything except kindness". The Sister of the Poor knows she must teach her heart to love and learn to "sacrifice herself and to be sacrificed without complaint", aspiring to the heroism of charity and ready to welcome each person, whatever the form of poverty presented.

Combining "contemplation and action", persevere, dear friends, in your ecclesial service which blossoms from prayer as "the flower from its root".

In our time it is especially necessary to reassert the primacy of listening to God and of contemplation, as you have been intent on doing during the work of the Chapter. If Jesus lives in you, it will precisely be this intimacy with him that will prevent any fracture between spiritual experience and work, which must be constantly adapted to the changing needs of the times.

As well as meeting people's material needs, never lose sight of the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, mindful of what your Foundress affirmed: "Those who cannot give their neighbour God should not give him anything, and anything given to him instead of the Creator is not charity".

Dear Sisters, a vast field of action lies before you: make it your concern to prepare yourselves with an appropriate and constant formation. May the Blessed Virgin accompany and sustain you, and may St Catherine and Bl. Savina Petrilli protect you. I assure you of my prayers, while with affection I bless you and your entire religious Family.