



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MINIMS TERTIARY
FOR THE FIFTH CENTENARY OF THE APPROVAL
OF THEIR FIRST RULE BY POPE ALEXANDER VI**

Dear Minims Tertiary,

1. For the fifth centenary of the approval of the First Rule, with which the lay movement of the *Third Order of Minims* [secular branch of the Order of Minims] was juridically established, you asked me, through Fr Giuseppe Fiorini Morosini, the Order's Superior General, for a word of encouragement to continue your journey of faith and apostolic commitment in full communion with the See of Peter. I gladly grant this wish and hope with all my heart that you will always be most generously faithful to the Church and her Bishops. This has been your movement's style since 1 May 1501 when with the Bull *Ad ea quae*, Pope Alexander VI, granting the request of the hermit Francis of Paola, approved the first draft of your Rule, together with the second draft of the Rule of the Minim Friars of the First Order. Thus your lay movement, the *Third Order of St Francis of Paola*, officially came into being.

At the end of the 15th century the Hermit of Paola appeared to everyone as an outstanding champion of the Church's reform. Some members of the nobility and of the common people asked to share more closely in his penitential commitment, without renouncing their activities and the married state. To enable them to share in the privileges and spiritual benefits that the Pope granted to friars during the Holy Year of 1500, the Hermit of Paola perfected his idea of re-writing the Rule for the religious and drafted a completely new one for the faithful who had chosen him as their spiritual guide and master. The Minims Tertiary wished to commit themselves, together with the Friars, to a special witness of evangelical penitence, which was basically expressed through the restoration of the old form of penitential discipline, weakened in the 15th century by a profound crisis.

In the centuries-old history of the secular Third Orders, the approval of your Rule is an interesting

sign of something new: indeed the Rules of the first and third Franciscan Orders have never been compiled simultaneously by the same founder as your founder did, thus defining relations and charisms from the outset.

As in all periods of change, today too the Church asks believers for that indispensable conversion of consciences which alone can guarantee society's renewal. Was it not in the sign of penance and conversion that we celebrated the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, recently ended?

2. In this same perspective I invite you to commemorate the joyful occasion of your centenary by rediscovering the value and timeliness of your Rule. It begins with the solemn invitation to take seriously the evangelical journey, the guarantee of authentic happiness: "*If you would enter life, keep the commandments*" (Mt 19,17; cf. *Rule*, chap. I). This is the starting point for those who decide to follow Jesus, accepting the radical nature of the Gospel, which is not satisfied with natural honesty, but entails courageous choices that are often in contrast with common feeling. In this you follow your founder, who was indicated by the Church as *an ardent imitator of our Redeemer* (cf. Alexander VI, *Ad fructus uberes*, 20 May 1502).

Today the penitential proposal of your Rule is very fitting: founded on a "Lenten" spirituality, it is the real novelty of the charism of the family of the Minims in which you share. By simultaneously approving your rule and that of the friars of the First Order, my predecessor Alexander VI wanted to point out to the Church an evangelical style based on penance, in accordance with a journey marked by the *wholesome teachings of St Francis of Paola* (cf. Bull *Ad ea quae*). It is precisely in the penitential effort for conversion that you find the timeliness and originality of your ecclesial mission today.

The invitation to do penance, made by Jesus at the beginning of his preaching (cf. Mk 1,15), puts baptized persons into the condition of being in the world without being of the world. Thus your Rule (cf. chap. IV) calls you, with the words of the Apostle John, to affective detachment from the world: "*Do not love the world or the things in the world*" (I Jn 2,15); and with St James it reminds you that: "*Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*" (4,4). The explicit exhortation to flee *usury, unlawful contracts and every form of avarice* (cf. *Rule*, chap. I) stresses how the founder then clearly perceived the changes taking place in society; changes that were to create, by ignoring the evangelical dimension, the social and economic imbalances that we still deplore today.

How useful the wise suggestions of the penitent hermit Francis of Paola appear even today: "*the glory of this world is false and its riches are fleeting. Happy is he who thinks of a good rather than a long life; happy is he who worries more about a pure conscience than a full coffer*" (*Rule*, ch. IV).

3. The Second Vatican Council teaches how necessary interior freedom is: a freedom that does not detract from one's commitment in the world, from the desire to serve it and save it (cf.

Gaudium et spes, ch. IV), after Jesus' example (cf. Mt 9,36). Indeed, it is precisely because of this "loving distance" that Christians can understand the hope that faith in Jesus, the only Saviour, gives them (cf. I Pt 3,15), qualifying them to be "good Samaritans" in our society (cf. Paul VI, *Homily for the closure of the Second Vatican Council*).

All this involves sacrifice, because it requires mortifying and breaking those bonds that risk making us slaves of evil. Hence the need for spiritual action is born. It is achieved in prayer, in contemplation of the face of Christ and in interior discipline. Your founder led you on the path of inner discipline, demanding of you this spiritual commitment as a necessary condition for belonging to his Order: "*Whoever wishes to serve God in this kind of life must dominate his flesh*" (*Rule*, chap. V). He then recalled, in support of the Rule's prescriptions, the words of the Apostle Paul: "*Put to death ... what is earthly in you*" (Col 3,5), because "*if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live*" (Rom 8,13).

The commitment required by your Rule does not enclose you in a totally interior spirituality but, appealing to your special penitential mission, urges you to share what is yours with your needier brothers. The Church's call to love God and neighbour must impel every baptized person. St Francis of Paola, follower and imitator of the ancient Fathers, in the Rule that he left you, very wisely combined under one heading, fasting, abstinence and works of mercy (cf. *Rule*, chap. V), thereby giving you, in the unity of the charism you share with the friars and nuns, the preference for the commitment to an active charity.

Accept, dear Minims Tertiary, the invitation I addressed to the whole Church to make room for a new creativity of charity (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 50), while taking into account the requirements you have already identified in your common research with the religious of the First Order. We cannot put out into the deep at the beginning of this new millennium without becoming more attentive to the needs of our brothers: "The charity of *works* ensures an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of *words*" (*ibid.*, n. 50). Learn from your founder the wonderful synthesis between the contemplative dimension and the witness of charity, which he developed through an apostolate of welcoming all who came to him, confident that they would find understanding and sharing. He knew how to put himself in tune with all the needy, afflicted in body and soul.

4. The happy celebration of the fifth centenary offers you the chance to be privileged leaders of the new evangelization. Do not be afraid of the difficulties, because the Rule shows you the necessary means to be strong and to proceed with certainty. It proposes prayer to you first of all, as the *sacrifice of praise to be daily immolated to God* (cf. *Rule*, ch. II). In that way you will excel in *the art of prayer* (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 32) which I presented to all the Christian communities, so that pastoral activity [*may be*] *profoundly rooted in contemplation and prayer* (*ibid.*, n. 15).

Then in your code of life there is the exhortation to care for the *purity of conscience* with the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The words used in this regard retain all their charm, although they

are associated with a spirituality that is far from our way of feeling: "*Jesus the Nazarene - he writes - full of flowers, whose joy it is to stay with the children of man, delights in the flowers of the virtues*" (*Rule*, chap. III). Lastly you have the invitation to participate in the Eucharist in which you find the source of your fidelity. The founder's words deserve to be remembered for their power of expression: "*May daily attendance at Mass be for you a wholesome piece of advice, so that fortified with the arms of the Passion of Christ, which are recalled in the Mass, you may be strong and faithful in your observance of the commandments of God. In attending Mass you will also pray that Christ's death may be your life, his pain the mitigation of your pain, his toil your eternal rest*" (*Rule*, ch. III). By lengthy meditation on your Rule, you will find a new incentive to give even more value to the sacrament of Reconciliation and to Sunday Mass.

5. May the fifth centenary therefore bring you to a more intimate rediscovery of the precious code of spiritual life bequeathed to you by St Francis of Paola. Do so as individual Christians involved in the world. Do so as communities, testifying that it is possible to build a *universal fraternity*, according to the divine project. Your local groups are called "fraternities" within which the brothers are called to be instruments of pardon, of reconciliation and of peace (cf. *Rule*, chap. VII).

By sharing the same charism with the friars of the First Order and the nuns of the Second Order, you find forms of cooperation and apostolic sharing with them. The participation of your delegates in the First Order's last General Chapter crowned a praiseworthy itinerary which had begun some years ago, according to which you had suggested and hoped after the Synod on the consecrated life (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 56). Continue on that road towards an even fuller sharing of your common charism.

May you be accompanied by the Holy Virgin, Mother of the Church and pillar of our hope. For my part, I assure you that I will keep you in my prayers and, while I invoke on your intentions and on your commitment the protection of the founder St Francis of Paola and of the holy Patrons, St Francis of Sales and St Joan of Valois, also Minims Tertiary, I sincerely bless you.

From the Vatican, 1 May 2001.