



# The Holy See

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**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY  
OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL**

*To Reverend Mother Juana Elizondo*

*Superior General of the Society of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul*

1. At the beginning of the work of the general assembly of the Society of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, I am pleased to address my warmest wishes to the participants and to assure them of my fervent prayer.

During this year of the 50th anniversary of the canonization of Catherine Labouré by Pope Pius XII on 27 July 1947, I invite each of the Daughters of Charity to take their saintly sister as a model of charity, humility and simplicity, the three Gospel virtues that deeply mark the spirit of the society. Favoured by a vision of the Immaculate Virgin in the chapel of the Rue du Bac in Paris, near where your gathering is taking place, Catherine transmitted to the world a message of love and trust in the Mother of Christ which benefited so many of the spiritually poor, and which you contribute to making widely known. May St Catherine Labouré, through her modest and silent life at the service of the lowliest, be a sisterly guide for each one of you still today, in your vocation and your commitment to follow Christ, the evangelizer of the poor!

2. To evaluate and encourage the society's apostolic vitality in fidelity to its founders, you have chosen the theme: *Inculturating the charism in a changing world*. Present in 86 countries, the Daughters of Charity work in the world's diverse societies, and through their service to the most deprived, they are involved in the process of inculturating the Gospel message.

Indeed, love of the poor involves respect for their cultures, which demonstrates the soul of their

human communities, as well as the recognition and acceptance of the values which constitute their wealth. Fraternal relations with everyone will develop from this attitude. This is the very example given by St Vincent de Paul when he sent his missionaries to proclaim the Gospel overseas. Thus knowledge of the divine mystery and the Gospel message can be passed on to people according to their situation, and they are called to nurture its seeds in their own societies. This is a considerable challenge for the new evangelization which requires of consecrated persons "a thorough awareness of the theological significance of the challenges of our time. These challenges must be weighed with careful joint discernment, with a view to renewing the mission" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 81).

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As St Vincent de Paul said, "the means which will help you to do this work well, is to give up everything ... you must be a stranger in order to be everything to our Lord" (*To the sisters sent to Cahors*, 4 November 1658).

5. Thus I encourage the Daughters of Charity to study deeply the demands of their adherence to what is at the heart of their apostolic vocation in the Church as St Vincent de Paul presented it to them: "The principal intention of the Daughters of Charity is to imitate the life of Jesus Christ on earth, to serve the materially and spiritually poor, that is, to help them know God and take the means to save themselves" (*Conference*, 16 March 1642). In the footsteps of St Vincent who wanted to bring the Good News of Christ to the ends of the earth, may the horizon of their commitment be the vast perspectives of the Church's universal mission! In giving themselves totally to God, in community, at the service of the poor, they will discover the true fruitfulness of their vocation, however ineffectual their activities may appear to be.

6. Daughters of Charity, may your simple fraternal lifestyle and your missionary commitment to the

poor be a source of inspiration to young people, through a personal and community radiance which reveals a glimpse of him who gives you life! This sometimes requires great sacrifices and profound conversion of heart. Still today the Gospel zeal that motivated St Vincent remains an attractive appeal for young people who want to work generously at the service of the most deprived of their brothers and sisters. Innovative and resolute fidelity to the insight of your founders, with unshakeable trust in Providence, will become for you and around you a powerful invitation to mission and a blessing for the future. Do not be afraid to awaken others to Christ's call to follow him on the way of the poor!

7. Now that we have come to the time of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, as a pledge of encouragement for your assembly's work and the apostolic life of the institute, I entrust all the Daughters of Charity to the motherly protection of the Immaculate Virgin, Mother of the Church and Mother of the Little Society, as well as to the intercession of St Vincent de Paul, St Louise de Marillac and St Catherine Labouré, and I wholeheartedly send them my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 2 May 1997.

**IOANNES PAULUS PP. II**

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