



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO FRANCISCAN YOUTH**

Saturday, 9 May 1998

Dear Franciscan Youth,

1. I am pleased to meet you on the the 50th anniversary of your foundation and the 20th anniversary of the approval of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order by my venerable predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI. I greet you all with affection. I extend a cordial greeting to the leaders and chaplains. I especially thank your representative for the kind words he addressed to me and for the interesting picture he drew of the spiritual and pastoral activities of Franciscan Youth.

Fifty years after the birth of your sodality you wish to renew the enthusiasm of the beginnings by deepening your knowledge of Franciscan spirituality and values.

The important anniversaries of these days will help you then to reflect on your specific mission within the great Franciscan family, to which you can offer the enthusiastic contribution of your youthfulness, animated by the fervour of your ideals.

2. Francis and Clare of Assisi hold an extraordinary fascination even in our time. Many young people are inspired by them and their example of evangelical life in their fundamental life decisions, sharing in the same ideal of a radical following of Christ. In particular your sodality undertakes, together with the First Order and the Secular Franciscan Order, to "pass from the Gospel to life and from life to the Gospel" (*Statutes*, n. 3; cf. *Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order*, art. 4). You thus assume the task of conforming your lives more and more to the teaching of Christ, striving to witness to it by word and example. This is the ascetical and apostolic journey that characterizes you as Franciscan youth; it helps you to become adults in the faith, to be apostles in the ecclesial community and to conduct yourselves in society as responsible persons, capable of courageously assuming the role to which Providence calls you.

You are not alone in this demanding journey of human and Christian formation, because Franciscan Youth is by its nature a vocation to grow in fraternity. By following Francis' original insight, you are well aware that a context in which people live as brothers and sisters encourages and spurs each one to open himself to his neighbour, making the most of his own potential. At the same time, he can receive the friendship and support of others. A central element of your Franciscan identity, therefore, is the presence of the brother to be welcomed, listened to, forgiven and loved: in his face you, like Francis, must recognize that of Christ, especially when dealing with those who are least and lowliest.

3. This fundamental vocation to brotherhood, which is characteristic of Franciscan Youth, makes you feel a part of the ecclesial community in which, in a spirit of poverty and "minority", you give a much appreciated humble and obedient service, according to the specific Franciscan charism. Everyone knows how much Francis loved the Church and with what firmness he showed his followers the ideal of total involvement in the ecclesial, diocesan and universal community.

Your Statutes appropriately refer to that type of life when it states that "Franciscan Youth live the Brotherhood as a visible sign of the Church, a community of love and privileged environment in which the sense of Church and the Christian and Franciscan vocation develop, as well as a place where the apostolic life of the members is naturally fostered"; and it adds that they "fully involve themselves in the life of the local Church, in an active and practical way, being open to all ministerial and pastoral possibilities" (*Statutes*, n. 7).

Thus, Franciscan Youth represents a shining ideal of life, which you responsibly assume through the "Promise". To achieve this ideal it is essential to cultivate a living relationship with Christ through an intense sacramental life and, above all, through constant recourse to the Eucharist, so loved by St Francis of Assisi (cf. *Fonti Francescane*, nn. 113- 114; 207-209). It is also necessary for you to cultivate within yourselves an authentic spirit of penance and conversion, preparing yourselves to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. It is your responsibility to respond in our time to the appeal that the Lord made to Francis to "repair" his house (cf. *Fonti Francescane*, nn. 1038; 1334), by effectively collaborating with the Bishops and priests.

In modern consumer society, where it often seems that economic interests prevail, be witnesses to a new and deeper respect for the goods of nature. Be peacemakers (cf. Mt 5:9), promoters of the dignity of every person, so that he will be respected in his reality as a son of God and loved as a brother in Christ.

4. May Mary, invoked by Francis with the evocative titles of "Holy Lady, Most Holy Queen, Mother of God" (*Greeting to the Virgin*; cf. *Fonti Francescane*, n. 259), be your model and your guide. May she, docile to the plan of God, obtain light and strength for you from her divine Son, so that you may generously respond to your vocation.

As I renew my cordial wishes for the important anniversaries you are commemorating in these days, I invoke upon you the heavenly protection of Francis and Clare, together with the host of saints and blessed that crown the entire Franciscan family, and I sincerely impart to you, to your leaders and to your chaplains, to your fraternities and to all Franciscan Youth a special Apostolic Blessing.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana