



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF
THE SONS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE**

Monday, 18 May 1998

Dear Sons of Divine Providence,

1. I am pleased to welcome you at the end of your General Chapter! I greet you all with affection, especially your General Director, Fr Roberto Simionato, whom I thank for his courteous wishes. In congratulating him on his re-election, I hope that, sustained by God's grace, he can continue with courage and far-sightedness to lead his confrères in the apostolic style of the blessed founder.

I greet the members of the new General Council and those who have completed their six-year term. Through those of you present here who have attended the Chapter, I would like to express my appreciation to all the Sons of Divine Providence who live in so many countries of the world; and I warmly encourage them always to keep "up with the times", as Don Orione loved to repeat.

I also greet the lay people who have taken part in this fraternal meeting for the first time, initiating a new phase which I hope will be rich in apostolic fruit for the life of the Little Work of Divine Providence.

2. In fact, your Chapter's theme was precisely: "*Orione Religious and Laity on Mission in the Third Millennium*", a theme you have analyzed with a view to the future, aware that the changed social conditions in which we live call for new forms of apostolate from your still young congregation; new but always animated by the charismatic spirit of your origins.

To respond better to your vocation, you intend to associate the laity more closely with your ministry, recalling, as I stressed in my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, that the various members of God's People "can and must unite their efforts, with a view to co-operation and exchange of gifts, in order to participate more effectively in the Church's mission" (n. 54). I am certain that closer communion between the religious and lay members of your family,

born from the heart of Bl. Luigi Orione, who loved God and his brothers and sisters, will lead to the spiritual enrichment of all and to more effective apostolic and social action in the world.

Our times require daring and generosity, absolute fidelity to the Gospel and to the Church, intense formation and courageous openness to the needs of our neighbour. Your founder would still say today: “We need a fire today that is not a spark but a roaring furnace”. Yes, how can we fail in the present age, especially in this year dedicated in a particular way to reflection on the Holy Spirit, to sense the need for the fire of this divine Person, the fire of holiness?

3. First of all, the fire of holiness. I wrote in my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*: “Holiness then must be called a fundamental pre-supposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation within the Church” (n. 17). And I observed in *Redemptoris missio*: “It is not enough to update pastoral techniques, organize and co-ordinate ecclesial resources, or delve more deeply into the biblical and theological foundations of faith. What is needed is the encouragement of a new ‘ardour for holiness’ among missionaries and through- out the Christian community” (n. 90).

This is what Don Orione understood when he issued from Chaco, Argentina, heartfelt appeals for new missionaries of the Gospel: “*I need saints! I need saints!*” (*Letters*, II, 236). The vitality of the congregation and its apostolate stems from the loving and persevering zeal for holiness of all its members. *Holiness before all else!* The ideal of conformity to Christ must always be the programme and dynamism which not only motivate your initial and ongoing formation, but also every institution and charitable project, your pastoral and missionary commitment, your relation- ship with the laity and all your institute's programmes for doing good.

4. The fire of divine love feeds that of fraternal love. Your daily presence among the “lowliest” will enable you to realize that it is impossible to spread the regenerating fire of love among others if one has not been inwardly moved by divine love. For this reason, Don Orione wanted a congregation that would live an authentic family spirit modelled on the community of the Apostles, where the bond of Christ's love was the secret of understanding and co-operation. Continue on this path, faithful to your Father's insight, for only in this way will you be able to work effectively together, beyond the frontiers of marginalization, at the service of the poor and the abandoned.

Bl. Luigi Orione was deeply aware of this need for the *apostolate of communion*. Attentive to the signs of the times, he observed: “In a world where there is only one law: force; in a world where cries often ring out from the battles between poor and rich, between father and son, between subject and ruler; in the maelstroms of a society that lives in hatred and seems to want to be swallowed up by it, we resist, with the example of truly Christian love” (*Parola*, III, 106).

5. We are now rapidly approaching the third millennium, and during your Chapter you reflected on the missionary challenges the Church is facing: first of all, the challenge of once again bringing the liberating message of the Gospel, in its truth and entirety (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 57), to all people and to the whole person.

I am sure that your congregation will make an effective contribution to this effort for the new evangelization, called as it is, in accordance with its particular charism, to offer a witness to charity, your privileged way of uniting people to Christ, to the Pope and to the Church. Your blessed founder reflected: “Who, in the Church and blessed by the Church, will go to

the poorest, the most abandoned, the most unfortunate? And how will we show Christ to souls, to the people? With love! How will we make Christ loved? With love! How will we save ourselves, our brothers and sisters, and nations? With love! With the love that becomes a holocaust but conquers everything; with the love that unifies and renews all things in Christ!" (*Informatio ex processu*, p. 1021).

Dear Sons of Divine Providence, keep unsullied this precious heritage bequeathed by your founder. With the laity's contribution, make your apostolic activity more effective and better suited to the needs of our time.

To this end, I entrust you and all your praiseworthy pastoral and charitable works to the heavenly protection of the Virgin Mary and Bl. Luigi Orione, and, as I assure you of a constant remembrance in prayer, I affectionately impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to your confrères, to your communities and to all those who belong to the great spiritual community of the Little Work of Divine Providence.

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