



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF
STS BARTOLOMEA CAPITANIO AND VINCENZA GEROSA**

Friday, 30 April 1999

Dear Sisters,

Welcome! I extend a cordial greeting to each of you, as well as to all the sisters of your institute, the *Sisters of Charity of Sts Bartolomea Capitanio and Vincenza Gerosa*.

Thank you for your visit! On the occasion of your 24th General Chapter, you wanted to meet the Pope to express again your fidelity to the Apostolic See and to be strengthened in faith and in your total consecration to the Lord. During these days of prayer and reflection you are involved in studying your specific charism of charity *for the good of your neighbour*, seeking to discern the most suitable ways for living it in the sociocultural context of the present day. In this regard, you would like to stress your identity more clearly in the light of the Church's teachings and, by discerning the "signs of the times", you are preparing to meet the challenges presented by contemporary society now on the threshold of the third Christian millennium.

Be faithful to the original insight of your holy foundresses! In this way you will be able to incarnate in changing historical and social conditions your specific charism, which you will certainly study and further clarify in the course of the Chapter.

2. You were born in the Church, as your Rule of Life says, *to express God's love for human beings by performing works of mercy*. This is a unique form of apostolate, which spurs you to see in your brethren, especially in the *poorest, most abandoned and lost*, the very face of the suffering Christ.

In times like ours, marked by the contrast between the affluence of one part of humanity and the wretched conditions of many poverty-stricken people often reduced to hunger amid the indifference of so many, extra love is needed to awaken consciences and to encourage people of good will to open themselves to the demands of justice and solidarity.

In this context of immediate and urgent need, be messengers and witnesses of the Gospel of love by your words, your actions and your life itself. Rekindle hope and courage in the people you serve by proclaiming to them the tenderness of God, who never abandons his children.

However, for this witness to be genuine and lasting it needs to be continuously regenerated at the pure springs of grace. You must listen to the Word of God and live it in real life. May your daily encounter with God in prayer motivate your service, so that everything you do is for the glory of the Lord and the good of souls.

3. Amid the expectations of their time, Sts Bartolomea Capitanio and Vincenza Gerosa felt the irresistible call to "*that blessed charity*". They saw Christ in the poor and told them that he was the complete answer to their deepest needs. Their example is a constant lesson to you, encouraging you to continue the same work, as valid today as it was then because it aims at proclaiming and bearing witness to Christ, the Redeemer of man and of the whole man. Incarnate this message in your daily service.

Your model is Jesus, who "*has compassion on the crowd*" (Mk 8:2). In his school, may charity continue to expand in your hearts so that you can reach as many people as possible. In this regard, I rejoice with you that in recent years your religious family, despite its small number, has increased its missionary activity in many countries, especially in Africa. This courageous initiative is a sign that the fruitfulness of charity is not measured by large numbers, but by constantly reviving the joy of religious consecration and generously opening your hearts to the needs of your brothers and sisters.

4. Dear sisters, continue on this path, letting the Holy Spirit, *the principal agent of the new evangelization* (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 45), continue to pour out his gifts of grace upon your entire congregation. I accompany these wishes with the assurance of my prayers.

May the Blessed Virgin whom you venerate as the Child Mary, guide the reflections and decisions of the General Chapter and help all who are called to assume the demanding responsibility of guiding your family for the next six years. I implore for all of you an abundant outpouring of the Spirit's gifts, so that the renewal of the institute will become a source of consolation and hope for many men and women. May my Apostolic Blessing, which I cordially impart to you and extend to all your sisters and to those who receive your daily apostolic care, be a comfort to you in your evangelizing mission and in your search for holiness.