



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE LITTLE SERVANTS OF THE
SACRED HEART OF JESUS**

Thursday, 2 December 1999

Dear Sisters!

1. I welcome you with great joy and cordially greet you all. My thoughts turn first of all to your Superior General, whom I thank for presenting your institute's expectations and plans to me. I also greet the general councillors and every member of your congregation.

You have come to visit me on a very special occasion for your religious family: in commemorating the 125th anniversary of its foundation and the 25th anniversary of the beatification of your foundress, Sr Anna Michelotti, you are preparing to celebrate a jubilee during the Great Jubilee.

This providential circumstance gives you an opportunity to reflect on the value and importance of time, which, as I recalled in my Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, has fundamental importance in Christianity. The world was created within the temporal dimension; within it salvation history unfolds, having its culmination in the "fullness of time" of the Incarnation and its goal in the glorious return of the Son of God at the end of time (cf. n. 10).

In the period between the Incarnation and the Lord's glorious return, the Spirit guides the Church so that, through the work of many generous souls, she can continue to bring the Good News to the poor, to heal the wounds of the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners and to announce a year of favour from the Lord (cf. *Lk 4: 16ff.*). In the various historical periods it is therefore always the Holy Spirit who, in fulfilling the Father's plan, stirs up different charisms at the service of the Church and of all humanity (cf. *Redemptionis donum*, n. 15).

2. Dear Sisters, you present yourselves to the world as the "*Little Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the sick poor*". Your name is a project of life for each of you. Be "little" so as to have an interior experience of the divine Master's special love (cf. *Mt* 11: 25). Foster within you the spirit of "service" to neighbour, after the example of the woman who loved to call herself the "handmaid of the Lord" (*Lk* 1: 38; cf. 1: 48). Visit the sick in a spirit of poverty, with only the wealth of God to whom you are consecrated, and bring them your motherly love. As your foundress liked to recommend: "Do not say 'I go to the sick', but 'I go to console the heart of the suffering Jesus'. If you go with this spirit of faith, be calm and certain that you are serving them well" (*Parole vissute*, p. 43). May visiting the sick be your first and most demanding pilgrimage, especially in the Jubilee Year.

In my Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* I entrusted religious communities with the task of spreading the spirituality of communion (cf. n. 51). To you, in particular, I entrust the task of being a sign and a remembrance of the love that reaches out to the sick. In this work may you follow the example of the Virgin Mary, who left her home in Galilee to go into the hill country of Judah, to visit the home of her relative Elizabeth, who needed help.

May the significant event you are preparing to celebrate be an incentive for you to renew your charism; may it make you even more faithful to your foundress' spirit and purpose; may it be the moment of a greater and more penetrating spirit of faith, which will lead you to see the Lord's face in every sick person you visit. Did he not say that he would consider anything done for one of the least of his brethren as if it had been done to him? (cf. *Mt* 25: 40).

3. Your work in recent years has grown beyond the borders of Italy and today you are present in Madagascar and Romania. I hope that it will spread further and I pray that your witness may be for the whole Church a sign of that interior pilgrimage which spurs the believer to leave everything in order to reach out with Jesus to every man or women in need of help. In all your houses, show God the Father's tenderness to those tried by illness.

May the double celebration now at hand strengthen you in your charism and make you ever more faithful to the spirit and desires of Bl. Anna Michelotti. May it also be a time of growth in the faith, which will lead you to live your vocation ever more deeply. You are called to see the Lord's face in every sick person you visit, as your foundress wrote: "We belong to Jesus; we serve Jesus who is the incarnate and eternal truth, who never deceives us, because his promises are infallible and he will never let go unrewarded even a glass of water given out of love" (*Parole vissute*, p. 42).

May Bl. Anna Michelotti protect you. For my part, I assure you of a remembrance in prayer and I cordially impart my Blessing to you all, which I gladly extend to your entire religious family, especially to the aspirants, the young women in formation, the sisters who are ill, and everyone you meet in your daily apostolate.

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