



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE PASTOR, CHAPLAINS AND ASSISTANTS  
OF THE MILITARY ORDINARIATE FOR ITALY**

*Thursday, 6 May 1999*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. It is a great pleasure to welcome each of you, members of the Italian Armed Forces, who have wished to visit me in such large numbers at the end of the first Synod of the Military Ordinariate Church. I affectionately greet your Pastor, Archbishop Giuseppe Mani, and thank him for the kind words he expressed to me on behalf of those present. With him I greet the Military Ordinaries of other nations, who have shared this moment of sincere communion with you. My cordial thoughts also turn to the representatives of the various religious confessions involved in providing spiritual care for military personnel who have wished to enrich your Synod with their presence.

I next wish to thank the Minister of Defence, the Honourable Undersecretaries and Chiefs of the General Staff for their significant presence at such an important event for the Military Ordinariate Church. Finally, I am pleased to extend my affectionate greetings to the chaplains and women religious who offer their valuable moral and spiritual support to all who carry out such an important service to the national community. I also express my best wishes for peace and happiness in the risen Lord to all those who in different ways collaborate with the Armed Forces.

2. The spiritual care of Italian military personnel since the unification of Italy has always been a constant concern of the Church which, through the generous work of many priests, guaranteed that those committed to serving their country would not go without the Word of God and the sacraments. This presence became more widespread and better organized after the First World War, when the Holy See, in agreement with the authorities of the Italian State, provided spiritual assistance for the Armed Forces by establishing a Military Vicariate for Italy with a Military Ordinary.

Chaplains have played an irreplaceable spiritual and human role, sharing the life and problems of the Armed Forces and offering everyone the light of the Gospel and divine grace. In this service, which is often humble and hidden, there have been wonderful priests who have honoured the Church and the Armed Forces.

Among them I am pleased to recall Bl. Secondo Pollo, a zealous and esteemed teacher of young people. He ended his earthly life at only 33 years of age on 26 December 1941, on the Montenegro front, hit by machine-gun fire while helping his Alpine soldiers who had been wounded in an ambush. Let us ask of him, sacrificed in the violence of war in that same Balkan region where the tragic clash of arms echoes once again, to obtain for that tormented land the gift of a lasting peace in which the rights of every person are respected.

3. The providential efforts for sound renewal spurred by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, through the wise and generous work of the Military Ordinaries and the chaplains, found a ready welcome among Christian military people, creating a new awareness of the Church and a renewed commitment especially among the lay faithful. We have thus passed from a "Church service" offered to the Armed Forces, to a "Church of service" assembled among those in the military world who are called to exercise their baptismal priesthood by working for peaceful harmony among men and women, in union with those who by the sacrifice of their lives have given the supreme witness of love.

With the Apostolic Constitution *Spirituali militum curae* of 1986, I wished to encourage this promising development by structuring the Military Ordinariate Church as a particular, territorial and personal Church, whose very name expresses its theological nature, its organizational structure and its specific features. It is made up of baptized military personnel, their families and relatives, as well as their domestic staffs, and those who by law are employed in the service of the Armed Forces or are associated with them.

The first Synod of your particular Church ends with today's meeting. It was held on the eve of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. During these three years of prayer and reflection, under the guidance of your Pastor, you have had an opportunity to discern in the light of the Word of God the plan that the Lord has for your Ecclesial Community and to reflect on its identity as the People of God assembled among military personnel in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. As a result, you have asked yourselves how to proclaim the Gospel in the context of today's military life.

How many new prospects for evangelization and service are open to the Military Ordinariate Church on the threshold of the new Christian millennium!

4. In democratic societies there is a growing conviction that the Armed Forces are called to be instruments of peace and harmony among peoples and of support for the weakest. In this regard,

how can we forget the numerous missions in which the Armed Forces were on the front lines in offering their generous help to peoples struck by natural calamities or humanitarian tragedies? How can we not admire the dangers and sacrifices that are faced by those who carry out peace-keeping missions in countries destroyed by senseless civil wars? With these interventions, the Armed Forces gain more and more credit as defenders of inalienable human values such as life, freedom, law and justice. This conception of military life is in harmony with the Gospel message that offers many pastoral opportunities for the Military Ordinariate Church. Every year in your ministry you meet most of the young, who are called to spend some months in the military. This is a characteristic that makes your Church seem like a family with many young sons and gives you an opportunity to come into contact with the world of youth, with its hopes and its disappointments.

The expectations and problems of young people, as well as the challenges that they represent for your Military Ordinariate Church, have received ample attention at this Synod. While expressing my appreciation for the work accomplished, I urge you to look with confidence at the world of young people, in the certainty that every word, every act of practical concern, every effort to open their hearts to Christ will yield generous and abundant good fruits in their spirit.

I also invite you to make every effort to be witnesses among them, even before being teachers, and living icons of the values you proclaim. Be reliable spiritual guides for them and support them each day by your prayer and example.

5. As your Archbishop recalled at the start, the military world, now and in the past, often appears as a vehicle of evangelization and a privileged place for reaching the height of holiness: I am thinking of the centurions of the Gospel, I am thinking of the first martyred soldiers and all who throughout history, by serving their sovereign land, learned how to become soldiers and witnesses of the one Lord, Jesus Christ.

My thoughts turn, in particular, to the Servant of God Brigadier Salvo D'Acquisto of the Carabinieri, who in very difficult circumstances knew how to demonstrate his fidelity to Christ and to his brothers by the gift of his life. May this marvellous host of believers and saints encourage you to continue in your apostolate. I hope that the celebration of the first Synod will arouse your enthusiasm and creativity so that you may become an ever more effective leaven of hope and salvation within the Armed Forces.

With these wishes, as I invoke the maternal protection of Mary, Queen of Peace, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to the Military Ordinariate Church, its Archbishop and each of you.

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