



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE SISTERS OF SAINT FELIX OF CANTALICE**

*Friday 16 June 2000*

*Dear Sisters,*

1. "Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come" (*Rev 1:4*). I am especially happy to welcome you as you gather for the Twenty-first General Chapter of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Felix of Cantalice, taking place in the year of the Great Jubilee. This is a year when the whole Church sings the praises of God for the gift of the Word made flesh and celebrates the Incarnation not just as an event of the past but as the mode of God's love in every time and place. Among the Felician Sisters too the Word has come to dwell in deep and powerful ways; and for the great things he has done among you let us give thanks to the Father of all mercies.

2. Your Congregation came to birth at a troubled time in Poland. The nation had lost its independence, and the question of how to regain freedom burned in Polish hearts. For some the only answer was armed struggle; but every attempt to throw off by force the yoke of oppression led only to greater suffering. In such a situation, God raised up Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska, who proposed a radically different answer to the question of how freedom might be found, drawing her inspiration from Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Felix of Cantalice. From them your Foundress learnt that the way to true freedom was not violence, but joyful self-emptying. This was not the logic of the world but of the Son of God who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (*Phil 2:7*); and it was this which would mark Blessed Mary Angela's whole life and help to awaken a nation from its spiritual lethargy.

For the great Saint Francis, the logic of the Incarnation led him to empty himself of attachment to all things, in order to possess all things in God. It meant accepting the wounds of the Cross in joyful imitation of the suffering Savior. For Saint Felix, the logic of the Incarnation meant walking the streets of Rome as "the Capuchins' donkey", begging food for his brothers, responding always with his famous "Deo Gratias", and feeding the poor from his alms-sack. For Blessed Mary Angela, it meant immersing herself in the suffering of the time, embracing "the little ones" in a life of action intensely rooted in contemplation. Such a life placed her firmly within a tradition of holiness reaching back through Saint Felix and Saint Francis to the Crucified Lord himself.

Your Foundress would often take the children in her care to the Capuchin Church in Warsaw where Saint Felix is shown bearing the Infant Jesus in his arms. In the figure of the Holy Child, Blessed Mary Angela recognized the little ones she was called to serve. She knew that Saint Felix was shown bearing the Infant Jesus in his arms because in bearing the burdens of the needy he had carried in his arms the poor Christ himself; and she recognized this as her own calling. By bearing the burdens of the weakest she and her Sisters would bear in their arms the "little" Lord Jesus. Blessed Mary Angela knew too that it was Mary who had placed the Holy Child in the arms of Saint Felix, and that it was Mary who was now placing her Infant Son in the arms of the Sisters of Saint Felix. How right then that she should dedicate the Congregation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

3. Yet the sword which pierced Mary's heart (cf. *Lk 2:35*) pierced the heart of the Foundress too. "Love means giving", she wrote, "giving everything that love asks for; giving immediately, without regrets, with joy, and wanting even more to be asked of us". In obeying the logic of the Incarnation and bearing in her arms the Lord himself, Blessed Mary Angela became a victim of love. Step by step she ascended the hill of Calvary in a journey of suffering both physical and spiritual, until her life was ablaze with the mystery of the Cross.

As she journeyed more deeply into Calvary's darkness she became more insistent that at the heart of the Congregation's life there should be devotion above all to the Holy Eucharist and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She bequeathed to her Sisters the motto: "All through the Heart of Mary in honor of the Most Blessed Sacrament". In long hours of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament she learnt that she and her Sisters were called to "reproduce the pattern of the Lord's death" (*Phil 3:10*) so that they might become the Eucharist. And in the Mother of Christ, Blessed Mary Angela recognized the one who shared in her Son's Passion most intimately, and she knew that this was the Sisters' calling as well. In Mary Immaculate she recognized the woman of the *Magnificat*, the woman whose self-emptying allowed God to fill her with the joy of the Holy Spirit. This was to be the life of the Sisters of Saint Felix.

4. Ours is a very different world, but we are no less challenged by the spiritual lethargy of our time and by the question of where true freedom lies. It is the Church's sacred duty to proclaim to the world the true answer to that question; and Religious men and women are crucial in that task. For the Felician Sisters, this must mean an ever more radical fidelity to the program of life bequeathed to you by your Foundress, since if there is not this fidelity among you then you too can fall victim to the spiritual confusion of the age, and there may emerge among you the anxiety and disunity which are its fruits.

I urge you therefore, dear Sisters, at this critical time in the life of your Congregation, to commit yourself in this General Chapter to more ardent worship of the Most Blessed Sacrament, to deeper devotion to Mary Immaculate, and to a more radical love of the charism of your Foundress. Embrace the Lord's Cross as Blessed Angela did! Then you will become the Eucharist; your whole life will sing *Magnificat*; your poverty will be filled with "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (*Eph 3:8*). Entrusting the General Chapter and the entire Congregation to Mary, Mother of Sorrows and Mother of all our joys, and to the intercession of Saint Francis, Saint Felix and your Blessed Foundress, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of endless grace and peace in Jesus Christ, "the faithful witness and firstborn from the dead" (*Rev 1:5*).

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