



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE SACRED HEARTS**

Thursday, 21 September 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus" (1 *Cor* 16: 23-24). How rich his grace is in this year of the Great Jubilee! And how abundantly is the love of the Most Holy Trinity poured out on us! In the joy of the Jubilee, I am pleased to greet you at the moment of your visit to the Successor of Peter, while you are celebrating the General Chapter of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and of Perpetual Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

In this year of the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Our Lord and Saviour, the whole Church sings God's praise. But for you, this thanksgiving hymn rings out with a very special note of joy, for you are celebrating the second centenary of your Congregation, which was founded on the feast of Christmas in 1800. Today, with you, I glorify God for the fruits of holiness and the rich apostolate that has developed in these two centuries. I am moved to recall the figure of your good Father, Pierre Coudrin, ordained a priest at the height of the troubles and violence sparked by the French Revolution and forced to hide, as well as the example of your Mother, Henriette Aymer de la Chevalerie, who suffered imprisonment for concealing priests. In the depths of the darkness that surrounded them, they were nonetheless illumined by Christ's light and experienced the Virgin Mary's love, to the point that they felt impelled to found your Congregation. While the Revolution was raging round them, your founders understood that true freedom was only to be found in the pierced heart of Christ (cf. *Jn* 19: 34) and that those who, like Mary, shared in his Passion and had their souls pierced through by a sword (cf. *Lk* 2: 35), could attain it. Throughout their lives in those turbulent times, they proclaimed the truth of the Cross of Jesus Christ.

2. After its foundation in France, your congregation spread across the world, obeying the Lord's mandate: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (*Mt 28: 19*). Its first expansion occurred in Europe, but later it spread to the Pacific region, to Latin America, Asia and Africa until today, when you are present in more than 40 countries. This growth is a sign of the power of God which has worked in you; but a clear sign of this divine encouragement is also the witness borne by missionaries such as Bl. Damien of Molokai and Fr Eustaquio Van Lieshout - to mention only the most famous - in whom we can see the face of the crucified Christ, shining with the glory of those who sacrificed themselves to save the lives of others. How many saints and martyrs you have given to the Church! That voice which said to the paralytics of the world: "I tell you, stand up and walk", is still familiar and close to you today. Indeed, you have wished to illustrate the intentions of your General Chapter with these words of the Gospel.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, today as always the Church is called to proclaim the power of the Cross to the world. It is a power that has no need of "eloquent wisdom" (*1 Cor 1: 17*), nor of "philosophy and empty deceit" (*Col 2: 8*) nor, even less, of deceptive ideologies. What it demands of you is that like Christ himself you open your heart to be converted through a reflection of the source of living water (cf. *Jn 4: 10*), the only One that can quench the thirst of the human heart. For this, each of you must imitate the Apostle in his wish to participate in Christ's sufferings "becoming like him in his death" so that others may know him and "the power of his resurrection" (*Phil 3: 10*).

You must therefore continue to follow the path of contemplation, since your mission requires a profound union with the Lord. Before sending you out, Christ calls you to himself; and if, every day you do not seek him in prayer, you will lack the strength to carry on as missionaries filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Only in the depths of contemplation can the Holy Spirit transform your hearts; and only if your own hearts are transformed will you be able to fulfil the great task of helping others so that the Spirit may guide them "into all the truth" (*Jn 16: 13*), which is the essence of the Christian mission. Social structures will never be able to be perfected or improved without a genuine conversion of hearts. Both of these must go together, because if structures are changed without hearts being converted, the structural changes might camouflage evil, but without overcoming it. This is why mission without contemplation of the Crucified One is condemned to frustration, as the founders very opportunely realized. This is also the reason why they insisted especially on the commitment to adoration of the Eucharistic mystery, since it is in the Sacrament of the Altar that the Church contemplates uniquely the mystery of Calvary, from whose sacrifice flows all the grace of evangelization. Learn in contemplation of the Eucharistic mystery to imitate the One who makes himself bread shared and blood poured out for the world's salvation.

4. A characteristic of your foundation is the fact that men and women form one Congregation, approved by Pope Pius VII in 1817, joined in one charism, one spirituality and one mission. This unity has not always been easy, and it is important for the governing bodies of both branches to

work for an ever more mature testimony of evangelical union, solidarity and interdependence among all the members of the Congregation. Within each autonomous branch your communities are called to flourish in a strengthening of a family spirit, that fraternity which leads to each one carrying the burdens of all.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, I pray most fervently that the General Chapter will offer wise guidelines for an ever more complete witness to your religious consecration, so that with still greater joy and energy you will cry out to a world sitting in «the shadow of death» (*Lk 1:79*): «Rise, take up your sleeping-mat and walk! Walk with us in the power of him who is 'light to those...in darkness' and who 'guides our feet in the way of peace' (*ibid.*)!»! May the Virgin Mary, Mother of Sorrows and Mother of all our joys, lead you always along the paths of contemplation, so that your apostolate throughout the world may truly bear witness to the Church's spirit, her openness to and interest in all peoples and individuals, especially the least and poorest of Christ's brothers and sisters (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 89). As a pledge of endless grace and peace in him, I gladly impart to all the members of your Congregation my Apostolic Blessing. © Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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