



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE RELIGIOUS TEACHERS FILIPPINI

Monday, 29 January 2001

Dear Daughters of St Lucy Filippini!

1. I am pleased to receive you and I extend a cordial welcome to each of you. I thank you for this visit, which you wanted on the occasion of your Ordinary General Chapter to renew the expression of your complete fidelity to Peter's Successor.

You have been working for years in various countries of the world and you lovingly put yourselves at the service of the Gospel, concerned for the needs of children, the poor and the suffering and seeking to draw inspiration for your educational ministry from Jesus the Teacher, in a style of discipleship based on spousal love. Continue on this path and help to spread the Gospel of love in the new fields of apostolate that the Lord entrusts to you. The experience, developed by your institute over long years of service to Christ and the Church, represents a good starting-point at the beginning of the new millennium for an even more fruitful season of consecrated and apostolic life.

2. Your General Chapter is taking place right at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. It deals with a theme that is of great interest to you: *"The Constitutions, Lamp for My Feet, Light for My Journey"* (Ps 118). This choice of topic is meant to emphasize the need for a fresh look at the Rule, since the Rule and Constitutions provide a map for the whole journey of discipleship, in accordance with a specific charism confirmed by the Church (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 37).

The Chapter's fundamental objective, therefore, is to offer members a more conscious interiorization of the Constitutions, in order to live an authentic community spirituality which can be a prophetic witness to the values of the kingdom. As a secularized mentality becomes more widespread, the faithful observance of the Rule for you, dear sisters, will effectively help to

strengthen you in striving for the Absolute by not conforming to the spirit of this world, but by growing each day in your conformity to Christ.

The Chapter assembly offers you the opportunity to return, with humility and courage, to the origins of your institute, drawing from them more intense energy to meet the challenges that now present themselves to your apostolic initiative. It is by looking at the remarkable experience of Cardinal Marcantonio Barbarigo and the young Lucy Filippini that you will be able to achieve the desired renewal of your structures and methods, while firmly maintaining the reference to the *Rule* and the *Constitutions*, which provide a map for the whole journey of Christian discipleship, in accordance with your specific *educational, pedagogical and charitable charism*. Through a greater fidelity to him, the cornerstone, who "is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (*Heb 13: 8*), the Holy Spirit's gift to your founders can continue to inspire your daily experience.

3. How could we fail to recall on this occasion the time when, towards the end of the 1600s, Cardinal Marcantonio Barbarigo, assisted by the young Lucy Filippini, began an extensive work of human and spiritual support for the young, dedicating themselves also to the improvement of women's status and the moral and cultural reform of the clergy and people? It was precisely to this end that around 1692 the "Schools of Christian Doctrine" for girls were established with a view to the renewal of the family and society. Thus a capable and stable corps of teachers was created, which was able to carry out, with fidelity and creativity, the educational project that Barbarigo and the young Lucy Filippini had conceived.

Your General Chapter, which is taking place at the dawn of the third millennium, is like a short break for considering the journey made up to now and for evaluating the more promising than ever start of a new season of ecclesial service in Italy, Europe and the mission territories where you work. The Church, dear sisters, expects much from you: from your example and from your generous apostolic dedication.

You are called to exercise a special educational ministry, which is expressed in constant signs of love, especially towards the poor, and which, through schools, fosters not only the solid cultural growth of your pupils, but also their conscious introduction to the perennial truths of the Gospel.

4. So that you can fruitfully continue your apostolate, your priority should be to cultivate a personal and community spirituality that can harmoniously combine the safeguarding of the interior life and the generous commitment to your multiple apostolic and charitable initiatives.

To achieve this objective, during the work of your Chapter you have appropriately identified *formation to the consecrated life, the spirit of prayer, fraternal communion and mission in the Church and in the world* as the privileged ways to continue to be a significant presence in our time, following the example of your founders. Faced with rampant religious indifferentism, you are called to carry out your specific mission particularly in schools, while bearing in mind the difficulties connected with the various cultural and local contexts. Be courageous and enthusiastic, without

letting yourselves be influenced by the many kinds of obstacles you may encounter.

Rekindle the burning sentiment of Paul, who exclaimed: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 *Cor* 9: 16). Learn from your founders to place your apostolate under the protection of Mary the Mother of God, whom the Church venerates "with filial affection and devotion as a most beloved mother" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 53). I am certain that in this way you will stir in the souls of numerous young people a desire to meet Christ and to serve him with an "undivided heart" in their weak and defenceless brethren.

With these sentiments, I gladly impart to you, dear sisters, a special Blessing, which I cordially extend to everyone, especially young people, to whom the apostolic task of your religious family commits you.