



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE THIRD ORDER REGULAR
OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI**

Thursday, 7 June 2001

Dear Brothers of the Third Order Regular of St Francis of Assisi,

1. I am pleased to welcome you during your General Chapter and greet you with affection. I extend a special greeting to Fr Ilija Zivkovic, whom you have called to take on the task of Minister General. My congratulations and best wishes to him and to those newly appointed by the Definitor General for fruitful work at the service of the Order and of the whole Church.

You have gathered for a careful examination of your religious, personal and community life, having as a term of reference the Gospel and the penitential charism, outlined at the time of the Third Order's origins and confirmed in so many centuries of history. In this perspective, you are aware of the urgent need for continuous renewal on your way of perfection in the footsteps of the "Poverello". Indeed, from this flows apostolic enthusiasm which reveals your hearts to your brethren and prepares you to take on their existential problems, in order to collaborate with Christ in the plan of salvation.

2. Following Christ in accordance with the teaching and example of St Francis of Assisi is a special privilege for you, for which you must be deeply grateful to the Lord who has called you. So many centuries of apostolic and charitable witness have enriched your Order with merits and experience, endowing you with a particular spiritual heritage, which you must take into account in your reviewing and planning.

However, religious life, imbued with the Gospel, does not stop at satisfaction with the past, but intensely lives the present and enthusiastically projects to the future. The dialectic between heritage and prophecy gives a valid basis to your hopes for the third millennium, which has

already started so well.

In this perspective you must feel committed to an ever deeper conversion to God, in whom you have placed your every hope. He must polarize your mind, setting you free from the many hindrances that could reduce the effectiveness of your Gospel witness in today's world. May the Father "grant you ... to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you ... may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3,16.17.19).

If, like Francis of Assisi, you carry the Lord's Spirit in your hearts and reflect Christ's image in your attitude, your presence in the Church will bear many fruits of life and will make an effective contribution to building the civilization of love, modelled on the Gospel.

3. In "dynamic fidelity" to your charism, "look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 110). Letting yourselves be transformed by the Spirit, you cooperate effectively in the evangelization of the contemporary world and become "privileged partners in the search for God, which has always stirred the human heart and has led to the different forms of asceticism and spirituality" (*ibid.*, n. 103).

In particular, persevere in your commitment to the missionary apostolate, where your order has acquired considerable merits, offering services of Franciscan life, culture and active charity. With a creative search, think up works of mercy that will renew your traditional attention to society's poorest and weakest, since serving the needy is an act of evangelization, the seal of Gospel authenticity and a catalyst for permanent conversion" (cf. *ibid.*, n. 82).

Like Francis of Assisi, preach peace and repentance, promote justice, defend the rights of the human person, raise your voice against exploitation and violence, attentively care for all the wounds that make humanity groan today.

4. If you can read the signs of the times in a perspective of faith and with a loving gaze, it will be easy for you to identify new forms of evangelization and charitable service, adapted to present needs.

Diligently help to promote culture, both as a service to your brothers and sisters in search of the truth and as a means of integral formation and a path of asceticism (cf. *ibid.*, n. 98). Study is "an expression of the unquenchable desire for an ever deeper knowledge of God, the source of light and all human truth ... it is an incentive to dialogue and cooperation, a training in the capacity for judgement, a stimulus to contemplation and prayer in the constant quest for the presence and activity of God in the complex reality of today's world" (*ibid.*, n. 98).

Lastly, do not forget your recognized commitment to Christian unity and ecumenical dialogue, as

well as openness to interreligious dialogue, which is also part of the Church's evangelizing mission (cf. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 55).

5. Here before you, dear brothers in Christ, is an exciting programme for the third millennium, which expects to see you as witnesses of Gospel conversion, workers of charity and evangelization, prophets of a world renewed in faith and love, through a fruitful inculcation of Christian values.

On this penitential journey, marked by the rhythms of conversion of heart and the sequence of works of mercy, Francis of Assisi is your master and model. Look to him, and he will lead you to Christ on the paths of the Gospel, in order to bring about a deep experience of love for God and for your brothers and sisters.

With this wish, I cordially impart my Blessing to all of you and to all the friars of the Order, as well as to the cloistered Members of the Third Order Regular.