



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE CANONS REGULAR OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Thursday, 6 September 2001

Dear Abbot Primate,

Dear Canons Regular of St Augustine,

1. I am glad to receive you on the occasion of the International Congress of your Confederation and extend a warm welcome to each one of you. I greet the Abbot Primate and thank him for expressing your common sentiments. I greet all the participants in this meeting, which has just ended, on the theme: *The participation of lay people in our charism.*

This gives you an important opportunity to reflect on the ancient form of religious life that is rooted in the traditional formula: "*Contemplare, et contemplata aliis tradere*" ("Contemplate, and hand on to others the fruit of contemplation"). The venerable Augustinian tradition combines a contemplative spirit with apostolic activity and this approach to life still marks your communities, present on every continent. Thus you continue to pass on a spirituality that speaks to the minds and hearts of our contemporaries who are searching for effective spiritual models for inspiration. As I joyfully congratulate you on your vitality, I urge you to persevere in the commitment to offer everyone you meet in your apostolate the ongoing proclamation of the Gospel, expressed in the daily witness of fidelity to your charism.

You offer to the clergy in a concrete way, the practice of community life for the Kingdom

2. In the history of the Church, your Order, which takes its inspiration from St Augustine, the great Pastor and Doctor of the Church, has played an important role. To the extent that the celibacy of the clergy was being affirmed more firmly, the community life of the Canons Regular around the Bishops enabled them to create the best possible conditions for total dedication to the cause of the Kingdom of God. The rapid spread of community life among the clergy, from North West Africa to Spain, from Italy to France and to the whole of Northern Europe, based on your model, testifies to

the validity of this practice.

The community life of the Canons Regular is distinguished by fraternal communion, the apostolate and an intense liturgical life. These three elements have retained their validity today even if they need to be wisely adapted to the demands of rapidly changing times. In this regard, the Rule itself is of great help to you; though it is linked to the spirituality of the early communities of Canons, it is always valid because it presents the charism of community life which flow from the undying Gospel principles such as charity, unity and freedom.

3. In your Rule which captures the heart, mind, spirit, personality and human and religious maturity of St Augustine, everything focuses on Christ, everything is articulated around Christ, the sublime interior Master. Everything is an invitation to rediscover an asceticism marked by obedience and fidelity to the Spirit.

From this stems the special emphasis that St Augustine placed on the value of contemplation and its close bond with community life. Contemplation, which flows from a radical orientation to Christ, consists in keeping one's gaze fixed on him, in order to be permeated and transformed by his Spirit.

That calls for a constant effort to acquire a deeper understanding of the Gospel and to put it into practice, living genuine, sincere and generous fraternal charity in the community, that results from, and leads to, progress in the interior contemplative journey. Fraternal charity that develops from intimate contact with the Lord thus becomes a gift and grace, to be shared with the brethren.

This is the contribution that the Church expects of you. I am sure that in living your charism to the full, you can help her to achieve the missionary goals toward which she is projected, impressing on your life the drive for the new evangelization.

4. The very theme of your congress on lay participation in the Order's charism, highlights an important aspect of your contribution to the evangelizing activity of the ecclesial community. To the extent that it seeks to put into practice the common priesthood of all the baptized and invites the lay faithful to be missionaries in the complex modern world, your way of life offers them a model they can follow. Indeed, you present a community experience in which lay people take up their specific role in the Church with responsible participation, strengthened by the grace that comes from a deep liturgical spirituality. All this creates the conditions for an effective service to evangelization and revives the atmosphere of the first Christian community, whose members "devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer" (*Acts 2,42*).

Dear Brothers! As we take our first steps in the new millennium with the awareness of all the social and religious challenges that lie ahead, you witness courageously to your fidelity to the mission

that the Lord entrusts to you, following the example of St Augustine, a brave and zealous Pastor. Like him, entrust yourselves to the action of the Spirit and do not fear to open yourselves with the optimism of the Gospel to human needs, "always ... prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (I *Pt* 3,15).

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom you venerate with special filial enthusiasm, accompany you and make your daily ministry fruitful. May the Blessing that I cordially impart to you, to your confreres and to all who have recourse to your Augustinian spirituality, be of great help to you!