



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE 17th GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSIONARIES
OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD**

Friday 14 September 2001

*To the Members of the Seventeenth General Assembly
of the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood*

With affection in the Lord, I welcome the General Assembly of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood on this feast of the Triumph of the Cross. How fitting it is that we meet on the day when the whole Church sings the glory of the Cross of Christ and rejoices in the power of the blood that flowed from "its source in the secret recesses of his heart to give the sacraments of the Church power to confer the life of grace" (Saint Bonaventure, *Opusc.* 3, 30). With you, I bow down in adoration of that infinitely precious stream flowing from the wounded side of Christ, and I pray that the General Assembly will seek to ensure that the power of his blood will flow still more abundantly through your Congregation for the sake of the world's Redemption.

The dawn of the new millennium is a time for bold planning (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29); and it is good therefore that you have chosen as your theme "The Future Face of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood". This is a moment in which the Holy Spirit is summoning the whole Church to a new evangelization, and the Successor of Peter looks confidently to the Missionaries of the Precious Blood to play an imaginative and energetic part in the Church's fresh efforts to "make disciples of all nations" (*Mt* 28:19) as Christ commands. Your Congregation from the beginning understood the import of the Lord's words: *Duc in altum!* (*Lk* 5:4). The command to Peter seemed to make no sense: he had toiled all night and caught nothing. So too now the Church is asked by Christ to go to places and to people where there seems to be little hope of success, and to do things which seem to make little sense according to conventional logic. The Lord asks us to abandon our own assumptions and to trust instead in his command, for he knows that otherwise

we will toil in vain.

When Saint Gaspar del Bufalo founded your Congregation in 1815, he was asked by my Predecessor Pope Pius VII to go where no one else would go and to undertake missions which seemed unpromising. He was, for instance, asked to send missionaries to evangelize the bandits who so troubled the area between Rome and Naples at that time. Trusting that the Pope's request was Christ's command, your Founder did not hesitate to obey, even if as a result some criticized him for being too novel. Casting his nets into deep and dangerous waters, he made an astonishing catch.

Two centuries later, another Pope summons the sons of Saint Gaspar to be no less bold in their decisions and actions – to go where others cannot or will not go and to undertake missions which seem to hold little hope of success. I ask you to continue your efforts to build a civilization of life, seeking the protection of all human life, from the life of the unborn to the life of the aged and infirm, and promoting the dignity of every human person, especially of the weak and of those deprived of their rightful share of the earth's abundance. I urge you to pursue a mission of reconciliation, as you work to rebuild societies torn by civil strife, even bringing together victims and perpetrators of violence in a spirit of forgiveness, so that they may come to know that "it is [the blood of Christ] that is the most powerful source of hope; indeed it is the foundation of the absolute certitude that in God's plan life will be victorious" (*Evangelium Vitae*, 25).

"The future face of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood" must be the face of the Crucified Lord who poured out his blood for the life of the world. His, certainly, is a face of sorrow, for "in order to bring man back to the Father's face, Jesus not only had to take on the face of man, but he had to burden himself with the 'face' of sin" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 25). Yet most mysteriously, even in the midst of such affliction, Jesus did not cease to know the joy which came from union with his Father (cf. *ibid.*, 26-27). And at the moment of Easter this joy came to its fullness as the light of divine glory shone on the face of the Risen Lord, whose wounds shine for ever like the sun. This is the truth of who you are, dear Brothers; this is the face of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood past, present and future; this ought to be your witness in the world.

But this will only be so if your mission springs from the depths of contemplation, in which "the believer learns to recognize and appreciate the almost divine dignity of every human being and can exclaim with ever renewed and grateful wonder: 'How precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator if he gained so great a Redeemer!'" (*Evangelium Vitae*, 25). Contemplation of the face of Christ was the prime legacy of the Great Jubilee (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 15) and it remains for ever the womb of Christian mission. Therefore a new evangelization demands a new depth of prayer; and I urge you to make this a prime focus of all your deliberations during the General Assembly, so that in these days of grace you will not cease to say: "It is your face, O Lord, that I seek" (*Ps* 26:8).

It was not by accident that Saint Gaspar del Bufalo established your Congregation on the Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady. For he saw in the glory of the Virgin the wondrous fruit of the sacrifice of her Son on the Cross. Christ's Redemption marvellously restores humanity to the splendour which was the Creator's intention from the beginning; and that splendour must be the goal of every plan and project of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. That is why you must look always to the Woman "clothed with the sun, the moon beneath her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (*Rev 12:1*). Entrusting you to the loving care of Mary and to the intercession of your Founder, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to the entire Congregation as a pledge of endless mercy in him "who has freed us from our sins by his blood" (*Rev 1:5*).