



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

Friday, 22 November 2002

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am happy to welcome you and offer my cordial greeting to each of you: to the members of the new and previous Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order, to the participants of the 10th General Chapter, and through you, to all Secular Franciscans and members of the youth movement "Franciscan Youth" present in the world.

At this General Chapter you finished updating your basic legislation. In your hands you now have the Rule which my predecessor of happy memory, Paul VI approved on 24 June 1978; the Ritual, approved on 9 March 1984, the General Constitutions, definitively approved on 8 December 2000, and the International Statute approved at this Chapter. You must now look to the future and put out into the deep: *Duc in altum!*

The Church expects from the unique Franciscan Secular Order a great service to the cause of the Kingdom of God in the world today. She wants your Order to be a model of organic, structural and charismatic union at all levels, so as to present yourself to the world as a "community of love" (SFO, Rule, art. 26). From you, Secular Franciscans, the Church awaits a courageous and consistent witness of Christian and Franciscan life that aims at building a more fraternal and evangelical world for the realization of the Kingdom of God.

2. The reflection made at this Chapter on "*vital reciprocal communion in the Franciscan family*" impels you to be more dedicated to promoting meeting and agreement, first of all within your Order, then among your Franciscan brothers and sisters and, last of all, as with the greatest attention, as St Francis wanted, in your relationship with the hierarchical authority of the Church.

Your renewed legislation gives you excellent instruments to realize and express fully the unity of your Order and your communion with the Franciscan Family, within precise coordinating principles.

In the first place you are required to provide a service of leadership and guidance to the fraternities, who are "coordinated and connected according to the norm of the Rule and the Constitutions". This service is indispensable for the communion among the fraternities, for orderly collaboration among them and for the unity of the SFO (cf. SFO, *General Constitutions*, art. 29.1) Important is "spiritual assistance as a fundamental element of communion", to take place collegially at the regional, national and international levels (SFO, *General Constitutions*, art. 90.3). Finally, the collegial service of the *altius moderamen* (*highest level of government*), "entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan First Order and the Third Order Regular", to which the Secular Fraternity has been linked for centuries (cf. SFO, *General Constitutions*, arts. 85.2; 87.1) is crucial.

I warmly hope that the new Presidency of the International Council of the Franciscan Secular Order (CIOFS), continue on the path pursued by the previous one that leads to the goal of the one true body, in fidelity to the charism received from St Francis and in conformity with the fundamental lines of the renewed legislation of your order.

3. In the meeting I had more than 20 years ago, on 27 September 1982, with the members of the General Assembly of your International Council, I urged you: "Study, love and live the Rule of the Franciscan Secular Order, approved for you by my predecessor Paul VI. You have in your hands a genuine treasure, that agrees with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, and responds to what the Church expects of you" (*Insegnamenti*, VI/3, 1982, p. 613). I am pleased to be able to direct similar words to you today: study, love and live your General Constitutions ! They urge you to accept the help to accomplish the will of the Father which you are offered through the mediation of the Church by those who have been constituted in her in authority and by your confreres.

You are called to make your own contribution, inspired by the person and message of St Francis of Assisi, to hasten the coming of a civilization in which the dignity of the human person, co-responsibility and love may be living realities (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 31ff.). You must deepen the true foundations of universal fraternity, and everywhere create a spirit of hospitality and of brotherhood. Firmly oppose every kind of exploitation, discrimination and marginalization, and every attitude of indifference to others.

4. Secular Franciscans, you live by vocation your belonging to the Church and to society as inseparable realities. For this reason, you are asked first of all to bear a personal witness in the place where you live: "before all: in [your] family life; in [your] work; in [your] joys and sufferings; in [your] associations with all men and women, brothers and sisters of the same Father; in [your] presence and participation in the life of society; in [your] fraternal relationship with all creatures" (SFO, *General Constitutions*, art. 12.1). Perhaps, you will not be required to pour out your blood as

a martyr, but you will certainly be asked to give a coherent and steadfast witness in fulfilling the promises made at your Baptism and Confirmation, which you renewed and confirmed with your profession in the Franciscan Secular Order. By virtue of this profession, the Rule and the General Constitutions must represent for each of you the point of reference for daily living, based on your explicit vocation and special identity (cf. *Promulgation of the General Constitutions of the SFO*). If you are truly driven by the Spirit to reach the perfection of charity in your secular state, "it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 31). You must be sincerely dedicated to that "high standard of ordinary Christian living" (*ibid.*), to which I invited all the faithful at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

5. I do not want to end this Message without recommending that you consider your family as the primary setting in which to live your Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation, finding time for prayer, for the Word of God and for Christian catechesis, and doing your utmost to make every life respected from its conception and in every situation until death. You must live in such a way that your families "show convincingly that it is possible to live marriage fully in keeping with God's plan and with the true good of the human person - of the spouses, and of the children who are more fragile" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 47).

At this time, I urge you to take again into your hands the Rosary, which, by ancient tradition, "has shown itself particularly effective as a prayer which brings the family together. Individual family members, in turning their eyes towards Jesus, also regain the ability to look one another in the eye, to communicate, to show solidarity, to forgive one another and to see their covenant of love renewed in the Spirit of God" (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, n. 41). Do so keeping your gaze on the Virgin Mary, the humble handmaid of the Lord, ready for his Word and for all his calls, whom Francis enveloped in inexpressible love and who was made Protectress and Advocate of the Franciscan family. Witness to her your burning love, by imitating her unconditional readiness and pouring out a stream of confident and conscious prayer (cf. SFO, Rule, art. 9).

With these wishes, I cordially impart to you, Secular Franciscans and to the members of "Franciscan Youth", a special Apostolic Blessing.