



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CONGREGATION
OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER (REDEMPTORISTS)**

Friday, 3 October 2003

To Reverend Fr Joseph Tobin

Superior General of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer

1. The General Chapter that your Institute is celebrating gives me the welcome opportunity to extend my cordial greeting to you, your delegates and to all of the brothers. I also join in congratulating you, dear Father, on your re-election as Superior General, and offer my best wishes for your and the new General Council's effectual work. In these days of intense prayer and community reflection, you intend to gather energy to give a renewed impulse to the central core of the charism of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer: the proclamation of the "*copiosa redemptio*" to the poor. In fact, the General Chapter is focusing its reflection on the theme: "*to give one's life for abundant redemption*".

May the Holy Spirit grant to each one that wisdom of heart and prophetic zeal which are so necessary for guaranteeing your Religious Family a more energetic missionary trust.

On this important occasion, I am pleased to continue a dialogue with your Congregation that, in the years gone by, has known particularly intense moments. In the Apostolic Letter *Spiritus Domini*, on the occasion of the bicentenary of the death of St Alphonus (in 1987), I had the opportunity to stress once more the actuality of the moral and pastoral message of the Patron Saint of Confessors and of Moralists, a "master of wisdom for his time", who "continues to enlighten the path of the People of God with the example of his life and teaching, as a light reflecting Christ, the light of the nations" (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano English edition, [ORE], 17 August 1987, p. 4*).

Ten years later, on the anniversary of the third centenary of his birth, I wrote: "It is necessary forcefully to proclaim the fullness of meaning which Christ reveals to human life, the unshakable foundations he offers to values, the new hope he brings to our history. This preaching must be incarnated in the concrete challenges facing humanity today and on which its future depends. Only in this way will the civilization of love awaited by all take shape" (*ORE*, 9 October 1996, p. 9).

2. The General Chapter now brings you to examine the realities of your Institute that, like others, is going through a phase of encouraging growth in certain parts of the world, whereas in others it is showing signs of crisis and fatigue. If, for example, in some countries vocations are flourishing, in others they are so scarce as to be worrisome even to the point of threatening your presence in these areas in the future. If the temptation of conforming to certain lifestyles, which are culturally dominant today, were to contaminate your communities, your religious spirit and evangelizing impetus would run the risk of being weakened. Equally, resigning yourselves to static pastoral methods that no longer provide adequate answers to the redemptive need of the men and women of today, could prevent the hoped-for missionary revival of your entire religious family.

How necessary, then, is that discernment which prophetically seeks to analyse the signs of the times in the light of the Word of God! I am certain that the General Chapter will imbue with a more decisive impulse the work of renewal that you have undertaken, singling out priorities and courageous apostolic choices, that will involve every Brother in their application with generous commitment. Without the contribution of all, it is difficult to arrive at the new spiritual thrust so hoped for.

Dear Redemptorists, allow yourselves to be led by the Spirit of the Crucified and Risen Lord. Here, I repeat to you what I wrote to the entire People of God in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*: "Let us go forward in hope! A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ. The Son of God, who became incarnate two thousand years ago out of love for humanity, is at work even today: we need discerning eyes to see this and, above all, a generous heart to become the instruments of his work" (n. 58).

3. Go forward in hope! Like your Founder, strive to keep your gaze fixed on the Redeemer and let yourselves be guided by Mary, his and our Mother. Only in this way can you be "collaborators, members and ministers of Jesus Christ in the great work of Redemption" (cf. *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer*, Rome, 2001, n. 2).

You are called to participate "in the Church's mission", combining the life of special dedication to God with missionary activity, following the example of our Saviour Jesus Christ in preaching the divine word to the poor, as he said of himself: "*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*" (*ibid.*, n. 1). To carry out this special missionary service an intense personal and community prayer life is to be fostered above all.

The people that meet you must regard you as "men of God" and, in their contact with you, experience the love of the merciful heavenly Father, who did not hesitate to give his Only-begotten Son (cf. I Jn 4: 9-10) for the salvation of humanity. The interior disposition of Jesus the Good Shepherd must be seen in you, always in search of the lost sheep and ready to rejoice when it is found (cf. Lk 15: 3-7).

4. The Constitutions of your Institute invite you to recognize current pastoral needs, keeping in mind that your apostolate is characterized, more than by specific types of activity, by a loving service that is offered to those people and groups who are the most spiritually and socially abandoned and poor.

Carry out this apostolate with a "creative fidelity", which maintains the original inspiration, re-proposing the initiative, inventiveness and holiness of your Founder as a response to the signs of the times emerging in today's world (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, n. 37).

For numerous reasons, still in our day, many are far from Christ and the Church and many are still awaiting a first proclamation of the Gospel. Encouraged by the example of St Alphonsus and the other Saints and Blesseds of your Institute, do not hesitate to go towards these people, to present them with the Gospel in a language that is adapted to the various personal and local situations.

5. At the school of your Founder, be teachers of evangelical life, remind all the baptized of their call to holiness, the "'high standard' of ordinary Christian living" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 31), adopting the popular style which distinguishes your pastoral methodologies.

St Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori devoted his energies to educating Christian men and women in this awareness. "It is a great error", he wrote, "when some say that God does not want everyone to be saints. Rather, St Paul says: 'This is the will of God, your sanctification' (I Thes 4: 3). God wants everyone to be holy, each one according to his state of life" (cf. *Pratica di Amar Gesù Cristo in Opere Ascetiche [The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ, in Ascetic Works]*, vol. 1, Rome, 1933, 79).

The search for holiness should be the foundation of every pastoral programme and your communities seen as an "oasis" of mercy and of welcome, schools of intense prayer that do not, however, distract us from our commitment to history (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 33).

The paths to holiness are personal and require a true and proper *training in holiness*, easily adaptable to each person's needs (cf. *ibid.*, n. 31). In today's complex society, the importance of such apostolic service becomes all the more urgent, beginning with the young people who are often faced with conflicting choices in life. Share your charism with the laity, so that they too are able to "give their life for abundant redemption". In this way, your missionary service becomes a "service to culture, politics, the economy and the family" (*ibid.*, n. 51).

6. If you announce with joy and a consistent life the "*copiosa redemptio*", you will bring about or strengthen the evangelical hope in the heart of many people, especially those most in need of it because they have been wounded by sin and its harmful consequences. I sincerely hope that from this Chapter assembly useful guidelines will emerge, directed towards an incisive apostolic programme which responds to the expectations and challenges of our times.

May Mary, Mother of Perpetual Help, together with your holy Founder and all of the saints and blessed of your spiritual family, sustain you in this mission.

As I assure you of my constant remembrance at the altar, I extend to you, Reverend Father, to the Chapter Fathers and to the entire Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, a special Blessing.