



The Holy See

**LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER
JOHN PAUL II
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY**

*To Sister M. Nirmala Joshi M.C.
Superior General of the Missionaries of Charity*

In this year of the Great Jubilee, as the Church throughout the world sings the praises of the Most Holy Trinity for the ineffable gift of the Word made flesh, there is for you and the entire family born of the charism of Mother Teresa of Calcutta the added joy of celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the foundation of the Missionaries of Charity.

It was on 7 October 1950 in the little chapel at 14 Creek Lane in Calcutta that Archbishop Perier established the Foundress and her first eleven companions as a Religious Congregation of Diocesan Right. This moment of grace came after a long process of discernment of God's will by Mother Teresa, as she listened to "the call within a call" (*Letter of the Foundress*). That small beginning has become an abundant stream of grace within the Church as the Missionaries of Charity have grown in ways that could not have been foreseen fifty years ago. For that great gift, I join you in giving glory to our Heavenly Father and I exhort you in the words of the First Letter of Peter: "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (4:10)

Just fifteen years later, on 1 February 1965, Pope Paul VI granted the *Decretum Laudis* which established the Missionary Sisters of Charity as a Congregation of Pontifical Right. Since then, the Missionaries of Charity Family has produced abundant fruit, as God has raised up contemplative Sisters, active and contemplative Brothers, Fathers, Lay Missionaries and the Co-workers of Mother Teresa; and a great host of people – of all beliefs and none – have become involved in this work of love which has spread throughout the world under the inspiration and direction of Mother Teresa. "This is the work of the Lord, a marvel in our eyes" (*Ps 117:23*).

From the very first, Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity were driven by the desire "to quench the infinite thirst of Jesus Christ on the Cross for love of souls. . . by labouring at the salvation and sanctification of the poorest of the poor" (*Letter of the Foundress*). These are words which go to the heart of both *your consecration*, your "clinging to Jesus" in love, your thirsting for him who thirsts for you, and *your mission* of joyful and whole-hearted service to Jesus in the poorest of the poor, never forgetting the Lord's own words: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt 25:40*). This is, as Pope Paul VI said in awarding the John XXIII Peace Prize to Mother Teresa in 1971, "the mystical and evangelical motive that transfigures the countenance of a poor, hungry person, a sickly child, someone repulsive with leprosy or a feeble man on his death-bed into the mysterious countenance of Christ".

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, I stated that consecration and mission must be sustained by *fraternal communion*, as a third essential aspect of the life to which you are called (No. 13). In speaking of community life, Mother Teresa constantly stressed the need to fulfil the Lord's "new commandment" to love one another (cf. *Jn 13:34*). She herself always gave a shining example of "a readiness to serve others generously, a willingness to welcome them as they are, without 'judging' them (cf. *Mt 7:1-2*), and an ability to forgive up to 'seventy times seven' (*Mt 18:22*)" (*Vita Consecrata*, 42). As you face the challenges of the new millennium, I encourage you to bear steadfast witness to genuine evangelical love among yourselves, that love which becomes a "particular sign, before the Church and society, of the bond which comes from the same call and the common desire – notwithstanding differences of race and origin, language and culture – to be obedient to that call" (*ibid.*, 92).

This Fiftieth Anniversary is certainly an occasion to give thanks to the God of all mercies both for the gift of Mother Teresa's single-minded and unstinting dedication to the Lord's call and for the abundant spiritual harvest which has come to the Church and the world through the Missionaries of Charity Family. But I pray that it will also be a moment of grace for each of you, a time to study more attentively and meditate more intensely upon your own call and the charism of the Congregation, so that you may enter still more fully into the mystery of the saving Cross of Jesus Christ, which your Foundress placed at the heart of your spirituality.

With cherished memories of the beloved Mother Teresa, I commend all the members of the Missionaries of Charity Family to the maternal protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary: may the Mother of the Redeemer enkindle in each of you a renewed desire for holiness, a keener thirst for Jesus, a deeper love for your vocation, and a more ardent desire to love and serve the Lord in the poorest of the poor. Invoking upon you the rich graces of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to all of you and to those who assist you in "doing something beautiful for God".

From the Vatican, 2 October 2000

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