



The Holy See

**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL
TO THE MEMBERS
OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION**

*To the Very Reverend Gregory Gay, Superior General
Congregation of the Mission*

With great affection in the Lord, I offer you my congratulations on your recent election and I ask you to convey my greetings to all members of the Congregation of the Mission gathered in Rome from 5 to 29 July for your Fortieth General Assembly. Faithful to the inspiration of your founder, you have chosen as your theme: "*Our Vincentian identity today, having lived the new Constitutions for 20 years: evaluation and three challenges for the future.*" As you review your apostolic activity and your community life in the light of your Vincentian charism, I invoke a fresh outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon you all, so that you can rightly discern the path along which God is calling you.

Responding generously to the needs of the Church in his day, Saint Vincent de Paul placed the evangelization of the poor and the formation of the clergy at the centre of his vision for your Congregation. As you have grown in number and spread throughout the world, your apostolate has naturally taken on many new forms, but these two aspects remain central. Your founder was deeply convinced of the fruitfulness of divine charity (cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 75) and encouraged all his spiritual children to see, love and serve Christ in the poor. I am confident that, by remaining true to Saint Vincent's vision, you will be better enabled to form others, laity as well as clergy, for the task of preaching the Gospel today.

"Contemplate the face of Christ, start afresh from him, witness to his love" (Instruction, *Starting Afresh From Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*, 19). My brothers, I urge you to take these words to heart as you plan for the future. Remember that all

apostolic activity draws its efficacy from an intimate personal relationship with Christ. The more you draw from the well-springs of Christian life and holiness through an ever deeper commitment to personal and liturgical prayer, the more closely you will be conformed to him whom you serve. With hearts open to God's love, you will be able to witness effectively in a world that cries out in hunger for the healing that only God can bring.

Four centuries after your foundation, the task of "bringing good news to the poor" (*Lk 4:18*) remains as urgent as ever. Not only do millions of people throughout the world lack the basic necessities of life, but the modern world is afflicted by many other forms of poverty (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 15). Your Congregation is called to explore new ways of conveying the liberating message of the Gospel to our suffering brothers and sisters. Be assured of the support of my prayers as you seek to respond generously to these challenges.

Many generations of priests have reason to thank your Congregation for the formation they have received at your hands. The importance of this apostolate cannot be overstated. Consequently it is essential to assign exemplary priests to this work: priests of human and spiritual maturity, pastoral experience, professional competence, capable of working with others (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 66). Many Vincentians with these very qualities nobly dedicated themselves to priestly formation in the past. I encourage you to continue this vital mission in the years to come.

Dear brothers, not only have you made an outstanding contribution to the work of the Church over the last four centuries, for which she is profoundly grateful, but you also have "a great history still to be accomplished!" (*Vita Consecrata*, 110). As you seek to consider how best to live the Vincentian charism, my message to you is this: "*Duc in altum!* Put out into the deep!" (*Lk 5:4*). Do not be afraid to venture forth, to put out the nets for a catch. The Lord himself will be your guide!

Commending your deliberations to the intercession of Saint Vincent de Paul and to the maternal solicitude of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, I pray that your Assembly may be enlightened and guided by the Spirit of wisdom, and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all the members of your Congregation.

From Castel Gandolfo, 18 July 2004

JOHN PAUL II