



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE IMMACULATINE FRANCISCAN SISTERS**

*Saturday, 17 June 2000*

*Dear Immaculatine Franciscan Sisters!*

1. I am pleased to extend a most cordial greeting to all of you, who have come from various parts of Italy, Brazil, the Philippines and India to participate in the General Chapter of your congregation. In particular, I greet the Superior General and the sisters who share with her the service of authority for the good of the entire institute. My affectionate thoughts turn to all the Immaculatine Franciscan Sisters and to the lay people associated with the apostolic work of the institute.

During your intense capitular work, you are reflecting on the theme: *"In the Third Millennium, Docile to the Holy Spirit like Teresa, Missionaries on the Paths of the World"*. Guided by the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit, you are endeavouring to study the specific spirituality of your work and the original freshness of the founding charism left to you by Capuchin Fr Lodovico Acernese, a charism lived in an exemplary way by the Servant of God Teresa Manganiello, the true cornerstone of your spiritual family.

This charism, entrusted to you by Providence, must spur every Immaculatine Franciscan Sister to be a missionary in the areas most in keeping with the consecrated life and your apostolic activities: from the instruction and education of children and young people, to catechesis, to collaboration in the pastoral activities of parishes and missions, as well as to all those programmes of solidarity and assistance that are not only compatible with the spirit of the institute, but respond better to the Church's needs in our time.

It is truly a contemporary charism that finds its origin and strength in the authentic Franciscan tradition and in the most genuine Marian spirituality.

2. First of all, you are Franciscans. The first characteristic of your apostolic life and activity is the Franciscan ideal. This is confirmed by your Constitutions, which identify the supreme rule of life for every Immaculatine Franciscan Sister as "following Christ more closely, according to the form of the holy Gospel", as it is proposed "in the examples and teachings of our Seraphic Father St Francis" (*Constitutions*, n. 2).

The *Poverello* of Assisi made the Gospel the centre of his interior experience (cf. *Testament*, 16-18: *Fonti Francescane*, n. 116) and he proposed it to his friars as their supreme rule of life (cf. *Regula Bullata*, I, 2: *Fonti Francescane*, n. 75). He was followed on this evangelical path by a great throng of spiritual sons and daughters, one of whom deserves special mention: his "little plant", St Clare (cf. *Rule of St Clare*, I, 1-2: *Fonti Francescane*, n. 2750).

In the school of Francis and Clare of Assisi, every Immaculatine Franciscan Sister is called to show the men and women of the third millennium the transforming power of the Gospel proclaimed by word and example, and thus to bring everyone the Good News of reconciliation and salvation.

May universal brotherhood, which was lived in a particularly intense way by St Francis and St Clare, guide you in your apostolic and missionary efforts, to which your congregation has always given great importance since its humble origins at the Mother House in Pietradefusi, by spreading everywhere the fragrance of Christ, humanity's only Saviour.

3. The other fundamental element of your religious identity is Marian spirituality. As your rule recalls, Fr Lodovico Acernese was distinguished by his extraordinary love of the Immaculate Virgin and, for this reason, he wanted to consecrate the institute he founded to Mary Most Holy as a "new homage to her Immaculate Conception" (*Constitutions*, n. 4).

Your Constitutions also indicate the most suitable way to show the institute's Marian face: "We will make that 'homage' shine in the congregation and in each one of us by a life of total consecration to the Immaculate Virgin. By looking to her and imitating her as the sublime model of Gospel life, we want to live and work for the conversion and sanctification of souls by animating our whole life with joyous sacrifice" (*ibid.*).

May the Immaculate Virgin, therefore, be your guide, your inspiring model, your constant help in daily life, your refuge in the inevitable difficulties and your happiness in the moments of joy and sharing.

4. Dear sisters, your Chapter is taking place in the heart of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which is a special time of grace and spiritual renewal for everyone. As I stressed in the Bull of Indiction, it also has a missionary aspect. For "the coming of the third millennium prompts the Christian community to lift its eyes of faith to embrace new horizons in proclaiming the kingdom of God" and urges Christ's disciples to fervently embrace the "missionary task of the Church in view

of the demands of evangelization today" (*Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 2).

I fervently hope that the celebration of the General Chapter will impart renewed missionary zeal to your institute, so that you may continue in the Franciscan style and Marian spirituality that have characterized you from the beginning and represent the most precious legacy bequeathed to you by Fr Lodovico Acernese and Teresa Manganiello. Continue to walk in their footsteps, bearing abundant good fruits.

I entrust you, your sisters who work in Italy and elsewhere in the world, and your loved ones to the heavenly protection of Mary Immaculate, "Woman of silence, given to listening, docile in the hands of the Father" (*ibid.*, n. 14), and of St Francis of Assisi, as I bless you with affection, together with everyone you meet in your daily Franciscan and Marian apostolate.

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