



The Holy See

**SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE SIXTH
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
FR KOLBE MISSIONARIES OF THE IMMACULATA**

19 June 2000

Dear Fr Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata!

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the Ordinary Assembly which you are holding these days in Bologna. I greet you all affectionately. In a special way I greet the Director General and her Council, as well as Fr Luigi Faccenda, your founder and the institute's spiritual guide. By your visit you intend to strengthen your communion with the Successor of Peter. I am grateful for this sign of fidelity and love for the Church.

When you were numbered among the secular institutes of pontifical right on 25 May 1992, you became in fact a new branch on the fruitful millenary tree of the Church. As I join in your thanksgiving to God for the road you have traveled so far, I hope that the General Assembly will be a favourable occasion for you to reflect ever more deeply on your spirituality of total consecration to the Immaculata, following the example of St Maximilian Kolbe, the martyr of Auschwitz.

I am confident that the work of your meeting, supported and guided by the grace of the Jubilee, will strengthen you in your commitment of consecration to God, so that you can be a leaven of wisdom and witnesses to hope in today's world, which is waiting to be transfigured "from within by the power of the Beatitudes" (Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, n. 10). In this way you will call to mind the mission belonging to every disciple of Christ, which is effectively described by a well-known author of the early centuries in these words: Christians "follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, ... and yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through.... Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country.... They are to the world what the soul is to the body.... It is by the soul, enclosed within the body, that the body is held together, and similarly, it is by Christians ... that the world is held together" (Letter to Diognetus, ch. 5-6; Funk, *Patres Apostolici*).

2. I was delighted to learn that your young institute is spreading to various countries and that there are "Immaculata Houses" in Italy, Luxembourg, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, California and Poland, where, to keep alive the legacy of the

martyr Maximilian Kolbe, you are finishing a "Spirituality Centre" at Auschwitz which is meant to offer a message of hope to all who visit that place, the symbol of the most atrocious denials of human dignity perpetrated in the 20th century.

I also know that the "Immaculata Volunteers" work at your side, men and women of all states of life who embrace your spirituality and share the same apostolate. Your institute is distinguished by its Marian charism drawn from the teachings and example of St Maximilian Kolbe, whose love for the Immaculata is well known. He sensed that the mystery of the Immaculata contains the profound synthesis of the misfortune of original sin, the tragic story which ensued for sinful humanity and the divine plan of salvation which culminated in the Word becoming incarnate in the Blessed Virgin's womb. Spurred by this inner certainty, Fr Kolbe urged that the truth about the Immaculata be sown in the heart of every man and woman, so that the Blessed Virgin - as he said - would be able to establish the throne of her Son in everyone by bringing each person to a deeper knowledge and love of the Gospel. He also observed that when we consecrate ourselves to the Immaculata, we become instruments of divine mercy in her hands, as she herself was in God's hands. And he urged people to let Mary take them by the hand and lead them, walking "calmly and securely under her guidance".

3. Dear Fr Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata! Your daily experience allows you to see with your own eyes how the people of our time are waiting once again to hear Mary Magdalen's announcement on Easter morning: "The Lord is risen!" (cf. *Mk* 16: 10). They need apostles today who will proclaim Christ, man's only Saviour, as was done at the dawn of our faith, and will vigorously declare that his Death and Resurrection give everyone the possibility to hope and live to the full. May you also be apostles and missionaries!

With Franciscan zeal sow the truth of the Gospel in the hearts and lives of the brothers and sisters you meet in your daily ecclesial service. Your work of evangelization will have an impact on the hearts of those who hear you, if you remain firmly rooted in Jesus Christ. Your apostolate must flow from ceaseless prayer and a fraternal life that is a continuous search for God and his action in the complex realities of the world.

I ask the Lord, through the intercession of the Immaculata and St Maximilian Kolbe, to strengthen you in your zealous intentions and to help you with the ardour of his Spirit, so that the General Chapter you are holding may bring abundant fruits to your institute and to the Church.

With these wishes, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to each of you, to the members of your spiritual Family and to everyone who receives your pastoral care.

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