



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE OBLATES OF ST JOSEPH

Thursday, 17 February 2000

Dear Oblates of St Joseph!

1. On the occasion of your institute's General Chapter you expressed the desire to meet me in order to reaffirm your heartfelt loyalty to the Successor of Peter. I gladly accepted your request, knowing well how much your founder insisted on the duty of staying closely united with the Holy See in mind and heart. The first obedience to be faithfully observed by the Oblates of St Joseph, he said, is fidelity to the Supreme Pontiff's teachings and directives, and to regard their service as a mandate received from the Church herself, in accordance with the specific rules of the institute.

I cordially welcome you, then, with a special greeting for Fr Lino Mela, who has just been elected to the office of Superior General: may the Lord enlighten and sustain him as he fulfils his new mission. I would also like to express my grateful satisfaction to the outgoing Superior General, Fr Vito Calabrese, who has directed the congregation for 12 years with wise balance and fatherly goodness. Lastly, I extend my sentiments of affection to the entire religious family represented here by you, the Chapter Fathers, and I encourage everyone to persevere generously in their respective areas of work.

2. Your activity puts you at the heart of the Church. Indeed, the charism of the Oblates of St Joseph asks you to reproduce in your life and apostolate the ideal of service lived by the Guardian of the Redeemer. He, together with his holy Bride, lived in ineffable closeness with the incarnate Word, whom he had constantly before his eyes. It is this simple, hard-working lifestyle that you intend to follow, as you spread devotion to St Joseph by preaching, by publishing and, especially, by apostolic witness. This is the pastoral mission you carry out in humble places, among poor people, imitating the craftsman of Nazareth who protected Jesus and supported him in his

preparation for the great work of Redemption.

Bl. Marello urged his spiritual sons to be "hermits at home" in order to be "effective apostles away from home". This teaching, ever alive in your spirit, commits you all, dear Oblates of St Joseph, to maintaining an atmosphere of recollection and prayer in your religious houses, fostered by silence and appropriate community meetings. May your family spirit strengthen the unity of your communities and of the entire congregation.

3. I know that you have based your Chapter work on these themes, and I hope that you will be able to harvest the spiritual fruits you expect from your important meeting, which occurs in the year when the Church is celebrating the Great Jubilee of the Redemption. It is easy to see in this happy coincidence a sign of Providence, inviting you to cross the threshold of the "Holy Door", symbol of Christ, to enter a new spiritual season of the Church, inwardly renewed as individuals and as an institute. Thus you will be faithful witnesses to Christ in our era: trusting in the healing power of God's love, you will courageously dedicate yourselves to the new evangelization. In this way you will fulfil your mission "by doing the works of God in silence", as your founder liked to say, adding that if we work "without trusting in human beings or even in ourselves, but full of hope in supernatural help, everything will work out for the best" (*Briciole d'oro*, 15 February).

In this perspective the Chapter's reflection on the charism of your origins, which takes you back to the sources of your spirituality, is most timely, not so much to repeat slavishly what was done then, but to apply the founder's message to today's life, so that it will have as effective an impact on contemporary society as it did then.

4. A characteristic feature of your ministry is the human and religious formation of young people by emphasizing catechesis and by being active in youth centres, schools, parishes, after-school programmes, movements and associations. Just as the sower chooses the right soil for every seed, so you also try to acquire a deeper knowledge of the young people Providence puts on your path, to help them mature in their own vocation. This is your mission. One can say that the Oblate of St Joseph is essentially a catechist who teaches by evangelizing in a simple, clear and effective way.

May you know how to speak to young peoples' hearts and present the Gospel to them boldly. Make them love the Church. Be convinced that the more eloquent is the witness of your example, the better will they accept your message.

In order to meet the contemporary demands of evangelization, the collaboration of the laity is becoming more and more indispensable. This is not only a practical need occasioned by a reduction in religious personnel, but is a new, unprecedented opportunity that God is offering us. Our era could in some ways be called the era of the laity. Therefore be open to lay people's contribution. Help them to understand the spiritual motives for the service they render with you, so

that they will be the "salt" that gives life its Christian flavour, and the "light" that shines in the darkness of indifference and selfishness. As lay people faithful to their own identity, they are called to give a Christian inspiration to the temporal order by actively and effectively transforming society according to the spirit of the Gospel.

5. Dear Oblates of St Joseph, you now work in many parts of the world. The vast expansion that your religious family has achieved today, thanks be to God, demands a vigilant effort to preserve your unity and the bond of charity at all levels. Very appropriately, the General Chapter has highlighted the fact that, although you work in the local context, you must remain in harmony with the congregation as a whole, and above all with the Church's universal vision. This will occur if everyone's gaze remains focused on Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life; if personally and as a community you can cling to him who calls you to come and see where he is staying (cf. *Jn 1: 39*).

The solid practice of prayer, attention to the signs of the times and the indispensable continual formation will help you to make your works not merely a social service, but a witness to God's merciful love. Bl. Marello teaches you how to do this when he says to "take your own inspiration from St Joseph, who was the first on earth to look after Jesus' concerns; who guarded him as an infant, protected him as a boy and was a father to him for the first 30 years of his life here on earth" (*Briciole d'oro*, 24 March). So may it be for each of you and for all your communities.

Through the intercession of Mary, the gentle Bride of the carpenter of Nazareth, may the decisions of your General Chapter be fruitful. May she help all Oblates of St Joseph to strive for holiness, the vocation of every baptized person and, to an ever greater degree, of every consecrated person. I assure you of a constant remembrance in prayer, as I willingly impart a special Blessing to you, dear Fr Lino Mela, to the new General Council and to all the members of the Congregation of the Oblates of St Joseph.

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