



The Holy See

**LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER
JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL FIORENZO ANGELINI
FOR THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE BENEDICTINE
SISTERS OF REPARATION OF THE HOLY FACE**

To my Venerable Brother Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini

President emeritus of the Pontifical Council

for Pastoral Assistance to Health-Care Workers

1. On the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the beloved Benedictine Congregation of the Sisters of Reparation of the Holy Face of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I am pleased to share in the thanks that you, Your Eminence, are offering to the Lord together with the sisters of this worthy religious institution, which for many years you have been guiding with enlightened and diligent care.

It would be good at this time to return in thought to the origins of the institute, which were not without a higher motive. While the Church was celebrating the Jubilee Year of the "great return and great pardon", the Servant of God Ildebrando Gregori, then Abbot General of the Sylvestrine Benedictine Congregation, with strict and consistent application of the Rule of St Benedict began a work of assistance and human and spiritual formation for the poorest and most abandoned children, victims of the Second World War. In the light of the Gos-pel admonition, he was able to see in those "little ones" the suffering face of Jesus. The Pious Sodality, formed on 15 August 1950, soon received recognition as a religious congregation of diocesan right and later of pontifical right.

2. Constant reference to the Holy Face of Christ has sustained the spirituality of those who, from the foundation of the congregation until today, have endeavoured to make reparation for the offences daily committed against the Lord: an endeavour translated, according to the invitation of St Benedict, into a daily life of prayer ("*ora*") and the unceasing effort ("*labora*") to stand beside the endless crosses on which the Son of God continues to be crucified. The Virgin Mary is the model chosen for the Sisters of Reparation of the Holy Face by the Servant of God Abbot Ildebrando Gregori when he founded the congregation on the feast day of the Assumption.

I give thanks to the Lord for the vocational growth that the congregation has experienced in these 50 years, by virtue also

of its deep fidelity to its founding charism. The generous response of many young people in answering the Lord's call in these years has led to the opening of new and flourishing communities in India, Poland, Romania and Africa, where the institute has begun promising initiatives for the mission apostolate.

3. This expansion of presence and service has made it possible to undertake new forms of assistance to the poorest and most suffering, whether children or the elderly, in which the suffering Face of Jesus appears again, sometimes in particularly touching forms.

I also wish to express to the congregation my satisfaction with their decision to support the apostolate of service to the suffering by delving ever more deeply into the spirituality which inspires and sustains this apostolate. With this in mind, the congregation has made a decisive contribution to the creation of the International Institute for Research on the Face of Christ, whose aim is to encourage, through annual congresses, useful publications and numerous programmes, a deeper reflection on the Face of Jesus and the spread of devotion to it, both of which are underscored in the biblical phrase inscribed on the Holy Face medal: *"Illumina, Domine, Vultum tuum super nos"*.

4. At the dawn of the new millennium, as I look with heartfelt gratitude to the Lord at the good fruits produced by the institute in the 50 years between the Jubilee of 1950 and that of today, I ardently hope that the anniversary will be for each Sister of Reparation an occasion of renewed enthusiasm for the gift of her vocation and will spur her to bear the joyful witness of an exemplary consecrated life.

I entrust these wishes to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the crucified and risen Christ, asking her to help the Sisters of Reparation of the Holy Face to live their vows with both the rigour and the joy of those who, by following the evangelical counsels, unite themselves with Christ who, out of love, was "obedient, chaste and poor" (cf. [*Lumen gentium*](#), n. 46).

With these sentiments, I am pleased to impart a special Apostolic Blessing to Your Eminence, to the Sisters of Reparation of the Holy Face and to all who join them in giving thanks to God for this happy Jubilee anniversary.

From the Vatican, 27 September 2000.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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