



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF SORROWS

Dear Sisters,

1. I am pleased to offer you my cordial greeting, which I extend to all the Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows, as you hold the General Chapter of your institute.

You wished to begin your Chapter with a Eucharistic celebration at the tomb of your foundress, Mother Elisabetta Renzi, whom I had the joy of proclaiming blessed 10 years ago. Her spiritual presence among you and her heavenly intercession give your work the authentic inspiration that stems from your original charism. This reference to your roots will enlighten your discernment about the future progress of your congregation, which is celebrating its 160th anniversary on the threshold of the Year 2000.

"Towards the Third Millennium, with the Joy of the Risen One, to Build Unity in Diversity": this is the theme you have chosen for your General Chapter. For you too, as for the whole Church, the passage from the second to the third millennium suggests a new call from God, in whose hands lies the future of every human situation.

It is very significant that the Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows are advancing towards the third millennium "with the joy of the Risen One". Who, in fact, better than Mary most holy, so intimately united with the mystery of the Crucified One, knew the joy of his Resurrection? And who better than she can communicate to you, her daughters, this joy, that it may fill your hearts and your witness?

2. This immersion in the dynamism of Easter is the fruit of contemplative prayer, which you rightly consider as the soul of your every action. It is from contemplation, that, together with the primordial gift of the Spirit, all gifts, and in particular the gift of the consecrated life, take their origin (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, n. 23).

Everyday in the Eucharistic celebration, you renew your communion with Christ crucified and risen, and in adoration you experience the joy of abiding in his love (cf. *Jn* 15: 9). Especially in these intense spiritual moments, you realize the longing of your foundress: "I would like my whole being to be silent and everything in me to adore, in order to enter more and more into Jesus and to be so full of him, that I can give him to those poor souls who do not know the gift of God".

3. Mission flows from contemplation. Before being distinguished by exterior works, it is carried out by making Christ present in the world through personal witness. This, dear sisters, is your primary task as consecrated persons! Even your life-style should manifest the ideal you profess, presenting itself as an eloquent, even if often silent, preaching of the Gospel.

When part of the founding charism, the witness of life and the works of the apostolate and of human advancement are equally necessary: both in fact reveal Christ and his saving action.

"Religious life, moreover, continues the mission of Christ with another feature specifically its own: fraternal life in community for the sake of the mission. Thus, men and women religious will be all the more committed to the apostolate the more personal their dedication to the Lord Jesus is, the more fraternal their community life, and the more ardent their involvement in the institute's specific mission" (Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, n. 72). The whole Church counts greatly on the testimony of communities filled "with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (*Acts* 13: 52).

4. At a time of profound change, Mother Elisabetta Renzi was led by divine Providence to perceive, with prophetic insight, some of the most acute needs in the society of her day. She thus realized that the Lord was giving her a new call. It was as if God himself had placed her close to the problems of the young girls of her land. Her rule of life was to abandon herself to God, so that he would decide the steps and times for the development of her work as he wished (cf. Homily for the beatification, 18 June 1989, n. 6; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 10 July 1989, p. 4). Your foundress felt strongly called to bear witness to God's preferential love for his smallest and most needy creatures: and she responded with prophetic understanding, becoming a mother, educator and care-giver.

The Church has always considered education to be an essential element of her mission, and the Synod on consecrated life strongly confirmed this. Therefore, I warmly invite you to treasure your founding charism and your traditions, knowing that preferential love for the poor finds a special application in the service of education and instruction (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, n. 97).

5. I was pleased to learn that your institute has sought the collaboration of many lay people, who share not only in your work but also in the motives and inspiration itself that underlie it. I willingly encourage these forms of communion and cooperation, which can give rise to the spread of a fruitful spirituality beyond the confines of the institute and, at the same time, promote an ever more

intense cooperation between consecrated persons and the laity in view of the institute's mission (cf. *ibid.*, n. 55).

6. *"To Build Unity in Diversity"*. This objective summarizes your commitment on the threshold of the Year 2000, showing that it is in harmony with the whole Church. She, in fact, feels called to become a sign and instrument of unity in a world that increasingly brings different human realities into contact and dialogue. You experience this challenge within your own religious family, which in recent years has been enriched by the presence of persons from different countries and even from different continents.

This is a typical sign of the times in which we live, and you have decided to welcome it and to view it in terms of the Gospel as a call to a deeper and greater communion. "The more excellent way" (1 *Cor* 12: 31) to be followed is always that of charity, which brings all differences into harmony and imbues them all with the strength of mutual support in the apostolic effort.

"Placed as they are within the world's different societies societies frequently marked by conflicting passions and interests, seeking unity but uncertain about the ways to attain it communities of consecrated life, where persons of different ages, languages and cultures meet as brothers and sisters, are signs that dialogue is always possible and that communion can bring differences into harmony" (Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita consecrata*, n. 51).

7. Dear sisters, as my final word I wish to echo the motto of your blessed foundress: *"Ardere et Lucere"*. May every Sister of Our Lady of Sorrows, as well as the whole institute, burn and shine with divine love, so that they can transmit it to their brothers and sisters, especially those in greatest poverty, wherever Providence calls you to live and work.

May Our Lady of Sorrows constantly watch over you and obtain the fruits that you await from this Chapter. May you also be accompanied in your work by my Blessing, which I affectionately impart to all the sisters.

From Castel Gandolfo, 22 July 1999.

JOHN PAUL II