



# The Holy See

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**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART OF BÉTHARRAM**

*To Reverend Father Francesco Radaelli, R.S.J.,  
Superior General of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Bétharram*

1. On the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the birth of your founder, St Michael Garicoïts, I willingly join in the joy and thanksgiving of your institute's members scattered throughout the world, those who benefit from their apostolate and those who are taking part in the various celebrations which mark this second centenary.

When he was very young, Michael Garicoïts heard the Lord's call to follow him in the priesthood. The maturing of his vocation and his availability are associated with his parents' loving attention, and the moral and religious education he received, particularly through his mother's attentive care. Thus his family has an important place in his spiritual journey. It was the place where his human and spiritual personality was formed and a "domestic Church", according to the expression of St John Chrysostom, used by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (*Lumen gentium*, n. 11). Through it, young Michael learned to turn to the Lord, to be faithful to Christ and to his Church.

In our time when the values of marriage and family are often held up to ridicule, the Garicoïts family continues to be an example for couples and for teachers who are responsible for transmitting the meaning of life and showing the greatness of human love, as well as awakening the desire to meet and follow Christ. In this spirit, every Christian family is called upon to take part actively in "the mission of the Church in a way that is original and specific, by placing itself, in what it is and what it does as an *intimate community of life and love*, at the service of the Church and of society" (Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris consortio*, n. 50). It is the duty of Pastors to help and support Christian parents in their educational tasks.

2. Humble and persevering availability to the divine will is the basic principle of your founder's life,

action and priestly ministry. He continually repeated *Ecce venio!*, thus conforming his whole being to Christ the Redeemer, who came to do his Father's will. Those who entrust themselves to the Lord let themselves be moulded by him, so that God may make their action prosper (cf. 1 Cor 3:7). In this regard, St Francis de Sales liked to repeat: "God will work with you, in you and for you, and your work will be followed by consolation" (*The Introduction to the Devout Life*, III, 10). This filial attitude enables a person to discover God's infinite love and guides him throughout his life on the path of the practice of the theological and moral virtues; for "those who profess to belong to Christ are recognized by the way they live" (St Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 13).

After St Michael's example, the *Priests of the Sacred Heart of Bétharram* are called to turn to the Lord, to show him their love and their total availability. Through prayer, particularly mental prayer, an intimate encounter with the Sacred Heart, through recourse to the sacraments, they find the strength to live their priesthood in the heart of their religious community and in the different ecclesial services entrusted to them. In fact, contemplation and union with Christ are the source of all apostolates; "it is altogether impossible to enumerate the heavenly gifts which devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus has poured out on the souls of the faithful, purifying them, offering them heavenly strength, rousing them to the attainment of all virtues" (Pius XII, *Haurietis aquas*, n. 2, 1956) and the encounter with Jesus in prayer enlarges man's heart to the dimensions of the world. Today, by living the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus "consumed by love for us", the priests of your institute are following an admirable school for their personal life and for their missions. They will let themselves be led by the Spirit, in order to serve the Church according to the heart of God, by giving themselves totally, through love, for their brothers and sisters' salvation. May everyone remember that "to lose something for God, is to find it several times over" (Origen, *Homily on Genesis 7, 6*)!

3. St Michael Garicoïts fortified his interior life and refined his pastoral sense by frequent study of philosophy and theology. Thus he reminds his sons that they must continue their formation in order to be educators, for study is an indispensable element for all Gospel missionaries. In supporting the exercise of the priestly ministry, ongoing formation "has as its aim that the priest become a believer and ever more of one: that he grow in understanding of who he truly is, seeing things with the eyes of Christ" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 73). Moreover, men are in need of receiving the necessary instruction for their adherence of faith and for the witness they must give to their brothers and sisters.

St Michael was also deeply concerned about the spiritual guidance of the faithful in his care, that they might advance on the way of perfection. In line with St Francis de Sales and St Ignatius of Loyola, like your founder, it is more than ever necessary to continue to propose clearly to them the practice of spiritual direction, which enables each one "to progress on the path of holiness" (*Manuscript*, n. 594). I would therefore like to encourage the members of your institute on their part to adopt and pursue St Michael's intuitions, to teach our contemporaries to pray, to know and love Christ and to follow him according to their particular vocation. For faith and love provide a "secret",

"simple", "general" and "spiritual" wisdom, which sheds light on what it is right to accomplish in the world (cf. St John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, II, 17).

4. Religious life, a notable form of baptismal life, is made concrete in the ideal of ascetic and community life to which St Michael was deeply attached. It is invaluable for the Church, because it is the reflection of the holiness and fraternity which come to her from the Lord (cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Perfectæ caritatis*, nn. 8, 10; Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, n. 60). It expresses the desire to radically follow Christ with whom true happiness is found, by turning one's gaze to the world to come. As I rejoice that there are many religious vocations in the young Church, thus I encourage the members of your institute to pursue their religious commitment faithfully, in "the spirit of total self-giving to Christ and the Church" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 60), and lovingly to fulfil the missions entrusted to them.

5. The Church rejoices at the various services your institute provides on the continents where it is present, in close relations with the local pastors, in the spirit of St Francis Xavier. In particular, she strongly encourages and supports all movements and institutions involved in the education of youth. The future of the Church and of society relies to a large extent on the formation given to young people today. In many countries, young people are deprived of a family atmosphere, of affection and a structural framework for their instruction and interior growth. Sometimes they are also subjected to the degrading enticements of insensitive adults, which leave deep and indelible traces in their hearts. With the considerate and warm presence of mature and balanced teachers, it is right to give them the means to build their personality, to offer them a human formation and a suitable moral and spiritual education, so that they may become reliable adults, assuming their responsibilities in society, and faithful disciples of Christ. By awakening minds, in forming hearts and consciences to the essential human and spiritual values, educators prepare pastors and faithful who will be the protagonists of evangelization in the third millennium. The education of young people is an eminent apostolate, for in helping each one to make good use of his talents, the true teacher enables the person to flourish, leads him to discover the merciful love of the Lord and invites him to have self-confidence and to put himself at the service of his brothers and sisters.

6. For some years, you have been called to fulfil other missions than education, especially to face the new forms of poverty, showing the poor the loving, and tender face of our God. Attentive to the needs of the people of our time, you are keen to live availability and love in a new way, with young people, with families and in the environment of care structures, guided by concern for the integral advancement of every person entrusted to your pastoral care. I am pleased with your generous responses to these ecclesial services.

7. As I commend you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, for whom St Michael Garicoïts had a great devotion, especially because at the foot of her Son's Cross she remained "standing and never discouraged", I willingly grant you my apostolic Blessing, which I extend to all the members

of your institute and to the persons who benefit from your apostolate.

*From the Vatican, 5 July 1997*

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