



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY GHOST

To Fr Pierre Schouver

Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost

1. I would like to greet you at the time when you are meeting in Rome with the members of the General Council of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost to prepare to celebrate the anniversaries that this year and next year will mark the life of your religious family. I rejoice over the spirit in which you desire to live these anniversaries and affirm your missionary charism and dedication.

2. Next year, you will be celebrating the third centenary of your Congregation's foundation on 27 May 1703 by a young 24-year-old deacon, Claude-François Poullart des Places. At first it was a seminary, consecrated to the Holy Spirit with the Virgin Mary as guide and open to poor students.

It was your founder's intention that they serve the most forsaken parishes in the Kingdom of France. It was not long before the young congregation discovered a missionary dimension, sending the first priest to Quebec and, soon afterwards, others to Cochin in China, Senegal and Guyana.

Almost a century later, in 1848, Fr François Libermann, born to a Jewish family in Alsace and the son of a rabbi, who became a Christian at the age of 24, became the second founder of the Congregation by merging it with the Society of the Immaculate Heart of Mary which he had founded in 1841, and directed it to give priority to mission service on the African continent. This year you have celebrated the second centenary of his birth, as well as the 150th anniversary of his death.

3. Giving thanks to God for all the work your congregation has done for three centuries, especially in the evangelization of Africa, the Antilles and South America, I invite you to remain faithful to the double legacy of your founders: service to the poor, to all who are socially unprovided for and

marginated, and to missionary service, that is, the proclamation of the Good News of Christ to all people, giving priority to those who have not yet accepted the Gospel Message. This double fidelity, that you reaffirmed in the orientations of your last enlarged General Council of Pittsburgh, has often led you to begin your missionary work by founding a school to instruct young people and allow them access to knowledge, but especially by giving a genuine education that endows each one with a sense of his dignity, his rights and his duties. How could I fail to mention in this context the work of the Institute of Orphan Apprentices at Auteuil, entrusted to your Congregation since 1923? After the vigorous impetus Bl. Daniel Brottier gave it, now under his protection, it continues to live your missionary charism among young people in great difficulty because of poverty, the breakup of the family, school failure and social marginalization. Continue to be attentive to the call of the Spirit to reach out to the poor today and proclaim to them the Good News that is intended for them: it is the sign of the coming of the Messianic times as Jesus himself taught in the synagogue of Nazareth (cf. Lk 4,18).

4. Following your founders, you have recognized in the spirituality of consecration to the Holy Spirit a school of Gospel freedom and availability for the mission. "It is always the Spirit who is at work, both when he gives life to the Church and impels her to proclaim Christ, and when he implants and develops his gifts in all individuals and peoples, guiding the Church to discover these gifts, to foster them and receive them through dialogue.... He is the principal agent of mission!" (*Redemptoris missio*, nn. 29, 30). After coming down upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost to make them the first missionaries of the Gospel, the Spirit continues to give life to the Church and to send her to proclaim the Good News to the four corners of the earth. Stay attached to this devotion to the Holy Spirit that identifies your religious family.

The Spirit who unites the Church and gathers her members from all parts of the world to make them the people of the New Covenant, has called you to community life. May you be attentive to live this experience in daily life. Fraternal life in community is indeed a precious help on the sometimes difficult path of the evangelical counsels and missionary dedication. Besides, it is for our contemporaries a witness to the love of Christ: "This commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also" (I Jn 4,21).

5. On the path of evangelization there is no shortage of difficult situations. In certain countries particularly, you are suffering from the lack of vocations that weakens your dynamism. This trial is not limited to you: today it takes place in many dioceses and religious families. But the crisis strikes you especially, since you have always given a great deal of attention to vocations in your missionary apostolate, creating small seminaries in the young Churches entrusted to your care. Your special concern has also led to your being put in charge of the Pontifical French Seminary of Rome. Take care to help prepare the seminarians for their ministry through a human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral formation that enables them to be integrated into the ecclesial life of their dioceses. This includes a familiarity with the history and life of the local Churches and a continuous dialogue with their Pastors. The decline in the number of seminarians and missionary

vocations must not water down the quality of discernment nor the spiritual and moral formation needed for priestly ministry.

Indeed, the proclamation of the Gospel to the men and women of our time demands faithful witnesses, motivated by the Spirit of holiness, who are signs for their brothers and sisters by the power of their words, and, by the authenticity of their lives.

6. Dear Brothers in Christ, I have not forgotten your Congregation's full name: "Congregation of the Holy Ghost under the protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary". I ask Mary, Mother of the Lord and Queen of Missionaries, kindly to intercede for you and for the many members of your Congregation scattered around the world in the service of the Gospel. May the blessed Virgin Mary always be an example and a spiritual model for you! May her "yes" to the Lord be your rule of life! To you all, I warmly impart a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 20 May 2002.

JOHN PAUL II