



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE CONGREGATION OF PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

22 June 1979 Beloved Brothers,¹ I wish to tell you of my sincere joy at this meeting today, in the first place because of the special circumstance which interests the whole of your Congregation. For about a month your General Chapter has been assembled, in which you have elected the new General Council, as well as the new Superior General (Father Antonio Panteghini), to whom my cordial and affectionate congratulations go. Furthermore, strengthened by the prayer of all your Confreres scattered throughout the world, and animated by your specific charism you have meditated on the life of your Congregation which has made its contribution of spirituality and apostolic initiatives to the life of the whole People of God for a century. But this meeting of yours with the Pope takes on a further special meaning today because it takes place on the liturgical solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, from which your Institute takes its name and inspiration. Today the whole Church celebrates the divine and human Love of the Word Incarnate and the Love that the Father and the Holy Spirit cherish for man. This is the feast of the infinite Love of God, One and Three; of this, Jesus with his side pierced on the Cross (cf. Jn 19:31-37) is the supreme and definitive Revelation.² You are—and must always be—"Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus". This is what your Founder, the Servant of God Father Leon-Tean Dehon, wanted you to be, when he set up a Congregation entirely dedicated to the love and atonement of the Sacred Heart. Your Founder, who lived—as is known—from 1843 to 1925, in a historical period of various and vast spiritual, cultural, political and social changes, succeeded in being a Priest with a deep and intense interior life and, at the same time, a tireless apostle of social action, on the directives of the great Encyclicals of my Predecessor Leo XIII. "The spirit of the Congregation", Father Dehon wrote to his sons in a *Circular Letter*, "is ardent love for the Sacred Heart, faithful imitation of its virtues, above all, humility, zeal, gentleness, and the spirit of sacrifice; and indefatigable zeal in bringing forth for it friends and atoners, who will console it with their own love." These are words that sum up admirably the whole programme of your Institute, and they keep intact their strong emotional charge and their perfect relevance today. Let Jesus Christ, therefore, be the centre of your life, your ideals, your interests and your aims. With conversation, preaching, writings and the media of social communication, spread, "the breadth and length and height and depth" of Christ's love, "which surpasses knowledge" (cf. Eph 3:18 f.). But especially preach and spread it with the example of your priestly and religious life, animated by faith, by the supernatural vision of reality, and strengthened by absolute and jealous faithfulness to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which configure you to Christ. Reproduce in your hearts—according to Father Dehon's happy expression—the "holiness of the Heart of Jesus!"³ In particular, in this happy circumstance, I would like to recommend to you two other typical aspects of your Founder's spirituality: *faithful love of the Apostolic See* and *filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin*. His obedience to the directives and decisions of the Holy

See was always absolutely unconditioned, without any hesitation, without subtle and convenient distinctions, even—in fact especially— when those decisions cost him tears and sacrifices. His devotion to the Blessed Virgin was limpid, serene and deep. I sincerely hope that all Father Dehon's sons will follow these examples so as to start the second century of life of their Congregation with youthful and renewed apostolic fervour for the glory of God and for the edification of the Church. To the new Superior General, to the General Council, to you, Capitular Fathers, and to all your confreres scattered in all the continents, especially on the Missions, my encouragement and the assurance of my prayer that the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus may always be faithful to their original charism and always repeat with joy and enthusiasm: "Vivat Cor Iesu, per Cor Mariae!". With my special Apostolic Blessing.

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