



The Holy See

LETTER OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO THE MINISTER GENERAL OF THE ORDER OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

*To The Most Reverend Father
José Hernández Sánchez
Minister General of the Order
of the Most Holy Trinity*

1. This year the meritorious Order of the Trinitarians recalls the eighth centenary of the approval of its Rule of Life. It was in 1198 that, having acceded to the desires of Bro. John of Matha, my Predecessor Innocent III, with the Bull *Operante divinae dispositionis clementia* of 17 December, confirmed the fundamental document that established a Brotherhood in the Church with the aim of ransoming those who were imprisoned for their faith in Christ.

I am delighted to share in your joy at this happy anniversary. I first of all greet you, Most Reverend Minister General, and, as I once again express the Holy See's appreciation of the apostolic activity carried out by this order and by the entire Trinitarian family, I offer my wishes that this jubilee will, for all who follow in the footsteps of St John of Matha a reason and occasion for renewed fidelity to their charism by drawing from the fresh springs of your original spirituality.

2. This auspicious jubilee celebration providentially occurs during the immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which will commemorate the Incarnation of the Son of God, who came "to bring good tidings to the afflicted; ... to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim *liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound*, to proclaim *the year of the Lord's favour*" (Is 61:1-2). Your order made the liberation of the oppressed and love for the poor a defining feature of its mission in the Church and the world, faithfully following the holy founder who, in obedience to an inner call, felt spurred to work for the salvation of Christian slaves and for the humble and generous service of the poor as a *witness of praise and glory to the Most Holy Trinity*.

With the Trinitarian Order Christianity established a humanitarian contact with the world of Islam; in fact, Innocent III himself presented the redemptive and liberating work of your institute to leaders of the Muslim world, thus initiating a dialogue on the practice of the works of mercy (cf. Vat. Arch., *Reg. Vat.*, vol. 4, fol. 148r-v, an. II, n. 9).

Eight centuries later, such an exceptional charism still seems extraordinarily contemporary in the modern multicultural social context, marked by tensions and challenges that are even critical at times. This charism obliges Trinitarians to identify with courage and missionary boldness ever new forms of evangelization and human advancement, just as John of Matha did throughout his life.

He “unceasingly sought the will of God”. During his first Holy Mass, at the time of the consecration, he had a vision of Christ the Redeemer holding two slaves in his hands — one white, one coloured — to whom he offered redemptive freedom. This happened in the year 1193. The event, depicted in an artistic mosaic around the year 1210, is still visible on the portal of the house of St Thomas *in Formis*, given by Innocent III to the founder himself. From this divine inspiration arose his desire to care for slaves.

To reflect on this revelation and to develop his project, Bro. John retired to the wilderness of Cerfroid, where he met Felix of Valois and other hermits. With their help and that of the Bishops of Meaux and Paris and the Abbot of St Victor, he wrote and tested the Trinitarian Rule, which in 1198 he submitted to the Successor of Peter for approval.

3. The Most Holy Trinity as the source, model and goal of one's whole life: this is the heart of your spirituality. Your Rule begins, in fact, with the words, “in the name of the holy and undivided Trinity”, underscoring how faith in this fundamental mystery pervades the entire existence of those who, like your founder, choose radically to follow the Son of God. From this inexhaustible source of love comes your mission on behalf of slaves and the poor, which you, rightfully, live as a continuation of Christ's redeeming work.

Contemplating the mysteries of the Trinity and Redemption nourishes and directs your apostolic ministry, spurring you to share every spiritual and material gift you have received, to the point of making your lives a sacrifice of love for ransoming the victims of every form of material and spiritual slavery.

May each of your houses and your works be an upper room of praise to the Triune God and a source of generous self-giving to your brothers and sisters.

4. The centuries-old history of the order testifies that your mission is ever timely, even amid changing social and political situations. The examples of holiness and martyrdom that enrich your religious family prove the strength of your charism. Therefore, the present disciples of St John of Matha and Felix of Valois have the task of proclaiming to the world the Trinitarian mystery, thereby helping, as modern apostles of liberation for contemporary man, those who risk remaining prisoners of less visible but no less tragic and oppressive forms of slavery.

We are on the eve of a new Christian millennium: may this prospect further encourage you to make God's merciful face, revealed to us in the Incarnation of Christ, shine among men. Thus, you will become valiant defenders of the dignity of every human being. May the whole Trinitarian family in its various communities — nuns, sisters, secular institute, secular order, lay state — join in this task, thus translating your reflection on the specific Trinitarian charism, developed in recent years in the light of the Second Vatican Council, into a concrete ecclesial commitment.

To live among people today as the *epiphany* of Christ the Redeemer, as credible witnesses through whom God acts and

reveals his merciful and redeeming love: this is still your mission. With this objective you carry out a service of mercy and redemption for the marginalized and oppressed in our society, and especially for those who suffer persecution or discrimination because of their religious faith, their fidelity to conscience or to the values of the Gospel. Your action will only be effective to the extent that you follow in the footsteps of Jesus, making his life-style your own in a constant commitment to proclaiming the joyful and liberating “news” of the kingdom to every person.

5. Most Reverend Minister General, over the past eight centuries the disciples of St John of Matha have summarized their spirituality and their apostolic work in the motto: *Gloria Tibi Trinitas et captivis libertas*. May this motto continue to guide your ministry and your activity through the complexities of modern society. May you be sustained by constant and fervent prayer, in which you can draw from the inexhaustible reserves of light and love found in the unfathomable depths of Trinitarian life.

May the Virgin Mary, Tabernacle of the Most Holy Trinity, be at your side and implore from her divine Son abundant graces and spiritual consolations for every member of your great spiritual family.

With these sentiments, I assure everyone of an affectionate remembrance at the altar of the Lord and cordially impart to all a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 7 June, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, in the year 1998, the twentieth of my Pontificate.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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