



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINALS AND BISHOPS,
FRIENDS OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT**

Friday, 12 February 1999

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brother Bishops,

1. It is a joy once again for me to welcome you at the end of the convention, now an annual tradition, which brings you, Cardinals and Bishops who are friends of the Focolare Movement from the various continents, to the Mariapolis Centre in Castel Gandolfo.

I thank Cardinal Miloslav Vlk for his respectful address to me on behalf of everyone, in which he presented the full programme for these days of shared living, prayer and reflection in the context of the spirituality of the *Opus Mariae*. I greet and embrace each one of you, as I extend my cordial thoughts to Chiara Lubich and to the other representatives of the movement who are close to us in prayer.

This year's meeting, which is being held during the journey of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, now close at hand, was inspired by the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, and by the meeting held afterwards last Pentecost in St Peter's Square. The theme of your reflections has been the one God and Father, whose love is transmitted to us by the living presence of Christ among his people and by the continual action of the Holy Spirit, source of sanctification for believers, who constantly spurs them to build the one human family.

In this context, you have appropriately stressed the vital importance of prayer and Christian meditation as an experience of the love that lifts up the soul and unites it to God. "*Abba, Father*" is the invocation that rises spontaneously from the heart of believers enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

2. In our daily lives it is important that our intimate dialogue with the heavenly Father never be interrupted. Everything must take its meaning and value from this communion of life, so our being and action may express the merciful love of

God, source of unity and communion. If this applies to every baptized person, it is even more necessary for those who are called by Providence to be a bright reflection of the divine fatherhood among the Christian people entrusted to their apostolic care.

The Movement is wholly inspired by love: God's love for us, which we are called to reciprocate; love for our brethren, whom we should enable to experience Christ's caring heart. The longing for divine love becomes the basis of effective action for believers in building the one human family. It also becomes a service to the poor and needy.

In this light, the programmes organized by the Focolare Movement, not only in the ecumenical context but also in its contacts with the Jewish and Muslim communities, become particularly significant. The development of the project for an "economy of communion", under way in Brazil and in other nations, is also important. We should particularly mention the experience of Focolare communities in the area of conjugal communion built on the firm rock of Christian values. A correct understanding of the family institution in accordance with the Creator's original plan leads to attitudes of acceptance and respect for human life, in addition to mutual support, which represents a genuine model for contemporary society afflicted by so many problems.

3. All this highlights the vitality of the Focolare communities and is a source of encouragement to them as they continue on the way they have chosen. May you Pastors be able to discern, welcome and promote the charism which the Spirit inspires in the Movement, so that the desire for unity and communion, which is the most distinctive element of the *Opus Mariae*, may be fulfilled.

Be unflagging in your concern to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel of love. This requires a deep spirituality that can draw constant vitality from the Eucharistic mystery, in full harmony with the Magisterium of the Church and the needs of the ecclesial community. I entrust you and your responsibilities, which the approach of the Jubilee makes even more impelling, to the heavenly Father, who is rich in grace and mercy. As I call on the motherly protection of the Blessed Virgin, *Mater Ecclesiae*, I cordially bless you all.