



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SISTERS SERVANTS OF MARY IMMACULATE
AND VARIOUS ITALIAN PILGRIM GROUPS**

Saturday, 10 June 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. I am pleased to be able to meet you this morning, the vigil of Pentecost. You come on pilgrimage from various localities to celebrate your Jubilee in Rome. Your presence in the Eternal City, where St Peter and St Paul bore their courageous witness to Christ by martyrdom, gives you the opportunity to reflect on our common Christian commitment. May your pause at the tombs of the Apostles strengthen your faith and spur you to continue with renewed enthusiasm on the way of holiness, in fidelity to the Gospel and to the Church's teaching.

I extend a special thought to the Sisters Servants of the Virgin Mother of God present here, and I do so in the language familiar to them.

2. Dear sisters, it is a great joy for me to meet you today at this audience in the Vatican. I offer you a cordial welcome. I also greet Archbishop Zenon Grocholewski, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, as well as the priests present here and those devoted to Bl. Edmund Bojanowski.

The large family of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is formed of four congregations: the Servants of Debica, Stara Wies, Silesia and Great Poland. I greet the Superiors General of these congregations, the Provincials and all the sisters here, as well as the residents of Gostyn and Grabonóg, the birthplace of Bl. Edmund. I thank the Superior General who is also President of the Federation of the Sisters Servants for the words she has just addressed to me.

3. You have come to Rome, to the tombs of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, to give thanks for

the beatification of your founder, Edmund Bojanowski, who called your religious family into being 150 years ago. This pilgrimage is taking place in the Great Jubilee year and thus speaks with special eloquence. In my Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* I wrote that "the primary objective of the Jubilee ... is ... to inspire ... a true longing for holiness, a deep desire for conversion and personal renewal in a context of ever more intense prayer and of solidarity with one's neighbour, especially the most needy" (n. 42). For this Jubilee time and for every time, the Church calls you to imitate the example of your founder, whom I beatified in Warsaw on 13 June 1999, during my pilgrimage to our homeland. His beatification is a particular gift of divine Providence for your congregations and is permanently inscribed in your history. On the threshold of the third millennium, through this great apostle of the Polish people, a heroic witness to the Gospel, God wanted to show you your way to the future.

Bl. Edmund Bojanowski loved God and loved man. He was a man of prayer. His love for people, demonstrated by heroic deeds, was born of deep union with God through prayer. He drew from it the strength to serve man. That love grew in him on his knees and later bore fruit. Through prayer his whole life became a ceaseless service to the needy, especially children. For him, God's affairs were also human affairs, and love of God was love of man.

4. Dear sisters, in these days of pilgrimage, the life and works of Bl. Edmund must become a subject of special reflection. Through him, God wants to tell you that holiness, that striving for holiness, is the most important task of consecrated persons. It is the particular reason for the existence of all religious communities. You are called to bear a personal and community witness to holiness, which is the essential vocation of your life.

To bear fruit it is necessary to "live in Christ, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith" (cf. *Col* 2: 7). He must become the fertile ground of your growth and the maturation of what was begun in holy Baptism. "For you have died", says St Paul, "and your life is hid in God. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, not things that are on earth" (cf. *Col* 3: 3, 2). Therefore imitate Christ himself, who submitted totally to the Father's will; imitate Jesus in his prayer, to which he devoted long hours; imitate Jesus in his love for the human person. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (*Mt* 5: 16).

The witness of your life offered genuinely and unreservedly to God and to your brethren is indispensable for making Christ present in the world and for bringing his Gospel to all human beings.

5. At this point I would like to emphasize your self-sacrificing service to the needy. You thus faithfully fulfil your founder's desire, expressed in the words: "*The goal of the Servants of the Mother of God will be to serve the lowly and the poor for love of Christ*". For 150 years, without interruption, you have been giving proof of this love not only in Poland but in dozens of countries

on all the world's continents. You care for children, the sick, the elderly, the lonely and the poor. You work in hospitals, nursing homes, orphanages, boarding schools and kindergartens. You devote yourselves to catechesis and to parish work.

Today's meeting gives me a special opportunity to offer you my gratitude for this apostolate of charity, which is the most effective proclamation of Christ in today's world and the practical expression of your religious charism.

I would also like to mention a very important matter, the large number of you who take part in the Church's missionary activity. You have responded to Christ's call: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (*Mk 16: 15*), on the continents of Africa and Latin America. Several years ago you also started working in Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, Moldova and recently in Siberia. This is an important contribution of your congregations to the new evangelization and to the mission among the nations.

6. I prayerfully join in this great thanksgiving to God for the beatification of your founder and for the 150 years of your presence in the Church. The Church is counting on your generous dedication, on your disinterested and self-sacrificing love. Be a clear sign of the Gospel for everyone. Be living witnesses to the new civilization of love! May the Holy Spirit constantly work through you and awaken in the hearts of many young girls an intention like yours - the desire to follow Christ. May Immaculate Mary keep and guard you under her protection. Imitate her, the One who was perfectly obedient to God's will. Listen to her when she reminds you of what she once said at Cana in Galilee: "Do whatever he tells you" (*Jn 2: 5*).

I pray God that the grace of your religious vocation will bear abundant spiritual fruits. I bless those of you here and all the sisters of your religious family, as well as those whom you bear in your hearts and embrace with your prayers.

7. My thoughts now turn to the other pilgrims present. I greet the faithful from the parishes of St Flavian in Torano Nuovo, St Anne in Chieti and Sacred Heart in San Marco Argentano. I fervently hope that your beloved parish communities will always be moved by apostolic zeal to spread the Gospel message by word and example, for it is a leaven of spiritual and social renewal.

I also greet the group of the elderly from Santa Maria del Cedro and the members of the Heart Transplant Association of Verona. I offer you my warmest encouragement, dear brothers and sisters, so that in the Lord's help you will find comfort in your trials and support in moments of difficulty.

Lastly, I invite everyone to keep their gaze constantly fixed on Christ, "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (cf. *Jn 14: 6*). Remain always united with him. In this Jubilee Year, be concerned in a special way to rediscover day by day the love God has for his children; open yourselves trustingly

to his grace and you will thus be able to look to the future with sure hope. May the Mother of God, who intercedes for us, accompany and protect you. May she, the docile disciple of the Holy Spirit, help you to be ready to follow the divine Master in all things.

May you also be supported by the Blessing which I cordially impart to you and to your families.

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