



The Holy See

***SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER
JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE
GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE ORDER OF MINIMS***

Monday, 3 July 2000

Dear Brothers of the Order of Minims!

1. I affectionately welcome you and am grateful for the visit you wanted to pay me at the beginning of your General Chapter. I cordially greet Fr Giuseppe Fiorini Morosini, your Superior General, the Chapter fathers and the delegations of nuns and tertiaries who will be taking part in the first part of this important meeting, as well as the religious and lay people who form the three orders of the religious family founded by St Francis of Paola.

I thank the Lord with all of you for the good accomplished in your long and praiseworthy history of service to the Gospel. My thoughts turn in particular to those difficult times for the Church when St Francis of Paola was engaged in carrying out a reform which drew to a new way of perfection all who were "moved by the desire for greater penance and love of the Lenten life" (IV Rule, chap. 2).

2. Inspired by apostolic goals, he founded the Order of Minims, a clerical religious institute with solemn vows, planted like "a good tree in the field of the Church militant" (Alexander VI) to produce worthy fruits of penance in the footsteps of Christ, who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (*Phil 2: 7*). Following the founder's example, your religious family "intends to bear a special daily witness to Gospel penance by a Lenten life, that is, by total conversion to God, deep participation in the expiation of Christ and a call to the Gospel values of detachment from the world, the primacy of the spirit over matter and the urgent need for penance, which entails the practice of charity, love of prayer and physical asceticism" (*Constitutions*, art. 3).

Dear friends, draw constant inspiration from your founder, the humble penitent immersed in God who knew how to pass on to his brothers an authentic experience of the Divine. In him the Lord wanted to do "great things", entrusting him with

extraordinary tasks which prompted him to travel across most of Italy and France and to illumine them with the brightness of his holiness.

In the almost five centuries since his death on 2 April 1507, his sons, faithful to their founder's charism, have continued to proclaim the "Gospel of penance". They have endeavoured to live his spirit of humility, poverty and deep prayer, and to imitate his tender devotion to the Eucharist, to the Crucified Lord and to Our Lady. In particular, they are still committed to the "fourth vow of perpetual Lent". Thus they have extended the shining path of St Francis of Paola throughout the world, bearing witness everywhere to the indispensable role of penance on the journey of conversion and enriching the Church's life with wonderful works of charity and holiness.

3. "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history to build! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things". On this particular occasion I would like to repeat to you these words of the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* (n. 110), which clearly reflect the objectives of your General Chapter.

With the examination of the theme: "Missionary Identity of the Minims at the Beginning of the Third Millennium after 500 Years of History: Religious and Lay People Together, with One Charism for the Same Mission", the Chapter intends to revisit the charism of Lenten penance in the light of the challenges of the contemporary world, identifying the new areopagi which must receive the Gospel proclamation of conversion and reconciliation.

This commitment, which was already made at the order's previous assembly, needs to be translated into a significant and loving presence of Minims in situations of intense spiritual poverty through listening, spiritual direction and the formation of consciences in reflection and prayer. Your presence on the frontiers of material poverty can be very important for showing active solidarity to the needy, thanks also to your participation in bodies organized for this purpose. I am confident that the example of the founder, a messenger of Christ's peace, will sustain you in your mission of bringing the gift of reconciliation and communion to families, ecclesial groups, various Christian denominations and those who are indifferent and distant.

4. In evangelizing the new areopagi, you must first keep in mind that creativity and dialogue with the various cultures should not weaken your rich identity and history. Indeed, creativity and dialogue become effective vehicles of Gospel proclamation when they can rely on sound fidelity to one's own charism. A fervent community and penitential life are certainly the indispensable premise for each religious to bear in himself that transparent image of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ which alone attracts and wins over those who are seeking truth and peace.

An authentic and incarnated ministry presupposes holiness, which the Minims, after their founder's example, will seek to attain by following the way of penance. If this consists primarily in conversion of heart, it nonetheless employs the typical ascetical practices of the spiritual tradition of the Church and of your institute. In this regard, fidelity to the fourth solemn vow of the Lenten life, which St Francis of Paola wanted the friars and nuns of the orders he founded to profess, has particular importance.

This special sign of membership in the Order of Minims is very effective for bearing witness to the "things that are above"

in a world that is distracted and immersed in hedonism. For in addition to being a powerful means of personal sanctification, it is an opportunity to atone for the sins of all and a way to implore for them the grace of their return to God.

The tendency to seek immediate gratification, prevalent in contemporary society especially among young people, far from prompting the Minims to lessen the Lenten dimension of their institute, should commit them instead to serving their brethren with renewed zeal, in order to teach them the great spiritual way of penance. Of course, appropriate language and reasons must be found, but it remains indispensable to bear witness to the joy that comes to those who renounce worldly comforts to seek the precious pearl of God's kingdom (cf. *Mt* 13: 45-46). This witness will be a valuable gift that your order will offer to the entire Church by reminding everyone of the need to accept the Gospel of conversion and asceticism.

5. Beside the men and women religious of the first and second orders, St Francis of Paola wanted, with prophetic insight, to introduce lay people to the spirituality of the Lenten life and so founded the third order for them. For almost 500 years they have participated in the order's mission through many forms of sharing and collaboration.

The complexity and rapid changes of the contemporary world demand of Christians a ready capacity for discernment and an increasingly effective presence in secular affairs. To this end, collaboration between lay people and religious should be encouraged and supported by treasuring the positive experiences gained over the years. In fact, unexpected and fruitful insights into certain aspects of the charism can come from this collaboration (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 55). Therefore, all religious should devote ever greater care to the formation of lay people: may they be experienced spiritual guides, attentive to individuals and to the signs of the times, joyful witnesses of the charism which they intend to share with all who work more directly in the world.

6. Dear friends, the Great Jubilee invites the whole Church to contemplate the mystery of the Incarnation with renewed gratitude, in order to proclaim Christ's Gospel in the new millennium with increasing ardour: it opens before you a vast horizon of prospects and tasks.

May your order, after overcoming so many difficult moments in the course of its history, continue to be a shining light for the penitents of the Church: may it remind those far away of the need for conversion and repentance; may it encourage by example and prayer all who set out on this way; may it bear witness to a Lenten life which, by following Jesus on his way to Calvary, offers a certain foretaste of the joy of the eternal Easter already in this life.

May your communities draw from their treasure what is new and what is old (cf. *Mt* 13: 52), and thus be an expression of the ever-valid power of the way of penance which, by leading man to renounce his old self, prepares the way for the coming of the kingdom.

I entrust all your generous intentions and the Chapter's work to the Blessed Virgin, to St Francis of Paola and to the many saints and blessed who enrich your centuries of history, so that they may help you today to offer your charism anew as an eloquent sign of evangelical fruitfulness and of the renewal of Church life.

With these wishes, I gladly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to all of you here and to the entire Order of Minims in their threefold expression as friars, nuns and tertiaries.

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