



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE FRIARS MINOR CAPUCHIN

Friday, 7 July 2000

Dear Brothers of the Capuchin Order!

1. I welcome you affectionately on the occasion of your General Chapter. I cordially greet the Minister General, Friar John Corriveau, and, as I thank him for the sentiments expressed on behalf of you all, I congratulate him and offer him my best wishes for his office of service to the order, in which the Chapter has confirmed him.

One of the most authoritative biographies of your founder relates that, while Pope Innocent III was considering St Francis' request to be authorized to found a "new" form of consecrated life, he felt encouraged by a dream to give an affirmative answer: the Lateran Basilica appeared to him at the point of collapse, but next to it was a little, poor man who was supporting it with his shoulders to prevent it from falling (cf. St Bonaventure, *Legenda maior*, III, 10; FF 1064). Since its origins your religious family has been distinguished by the commitment, left to it by the man from Assisi, of great love for the Church and filial obedience and fidelity to her Pastors. All this well explains the significance of your visit today and thus makes it appropriate for the Successor of Peter to address you, the representatives of your confrères throughout the world, in order to urge you to persevere on the path you have taken.

2. The recent celebration of Pentecost has drawn our attention once again to the many gifts given by the Holy Spirit to enrich the Church. The very life of the Bride of Christ is the fruit of that outpouring of the Spirit promised by Jesus at the Last Supper (cf. *Jn* 15: 26-27; 16: 4-15). This outpouring, experienced so vividly on Easter evening (cf. *Jn* 20: 21-23) and the morning of Pentecost (cf. *Acts* 2: 1-4), makes the Church a splendid unity of different personal lives, joined in a deep communion of faith and love and engaged in bearing witness to the risen Jesus among all peoples.

The individual religious institutes with their respective charisms are also the fruit of the Spirit's love for the Church. In Christian discipleship and love for the person of Christ, "fidelity to the founding charism and subsequent spiritual heritage

of each institute" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 36) merit particular emphasis today. "The very charism of the founders (*Evangelica testificatio*, n. 11) appears as "an experience of the Spirit", transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth. "It is for this reason that the distinctive character of various religious institutes is preserved and fostered by the Church' (*Lumen gentium*, n. 44; cf. *Christus Dominus*, nn. 33, 35, 1-2, etc.).... It is necessary to preserve the identity of each institute so securely that the danger of an ill-defined situation be avoided, lest religious, failing to give due consideration to the particular mode of action proper to their character, become part of the life of the Church in a vague and ambiguous way" (*Mutuae relationes*, n. 11).

3. My meetings with you on the occasion of your General Chapters have given me an opportunity, among other things, to appreciate your efforts to rediscover St Francis' spiritual heritage in the light of the Council's teachings by taking great pains to identify what is truly essential in your charism. I encourage you to continue this task, remaining ever attentive and docile to the directives of the Magisterium.

You should keep in mind two particular aspects: first of all, the priority and centrality of Gospel brotherhood, as St Francis wished, which distinguishes you as friars and makes you an order of brothers. From this perspective, it will be your task to instil in every aspect of your life what is characteristic of the Franciscan-Capuchin charism: the spirit of prayer, lowliness, simplicity, poverty and austerity, contact with the people, closeness to the needy, zeal for evangelization, joy and Christian hope.

Among these values, you recently gave fresh consideration at your sixth plenary council to the choice of poverty. You were spurred to do so by the renewed sense of brotherhood which has been heightened by the spread of the order throughout the world. For the new problems of our society invite you to examine more closely Gospel poverty in brotherhood, lived, that is, in its communal, institutional and structural dimension (cf. *Proposition 4; Analecta OFM Cap.*, 114 [1998], 825). In contemplation of the poor Christ, you will find the inspiration not only to live a poor life personally, but also to love and serve the poor, whom my Predecessor Paul VI called a "sacrament" of Christ (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 60 [1968], 620).

Secondly, you see the timeliness of emphasizing the consistent, practical and concrete attitude of St Francis. It is necessary to move on to deeds, to lived values, to the method of direct witness. For you are all familiar with the criterion which your founder liked to use: plus exemplo quam verbo, more by example than with words (*The Legend of the Three Companions*, 36; FF 1440).

4. Your General Chapter is taking place in the Great Jubilee year. This is a providential circumstance which cannot be overlooked. The Jubilee is a year of grace for all the People of God: it is a time for conversion to a more authentic following of Christ, of interior renewal, of greater consistency and responsiveness to the Spirit, who challenges consciences through the signs of the times. You will be in full harmony with the grace of this Jubilee celebration to the extent that you strive to live your Franciscan-Capuchin vocation authentically. May the decisions reached at the Chapter help you to be more and more closely conformed to Christ, who entered our history 2,000 years ago.

May your Chapter help you accept the challenges of the new millennium with Franciscan courage. From the perspective

of Gospel newness, they invite you to creativity, boldness and optimism. "Especially in our times that same charismatic genuineness, vivacious and ingenious in its inventiveness, is expected of religious, as stood out so eminently in their founders" (*Mutuae relationes*, n. 23f).

5. May Francis, your Father and Brother, always guide and accompany you in your commitment to live in conformity with your way of life, so that you may become, as he desired, authentic lesser brothers. May you also be accompanied by all your confrères who have preceded you and are given to you as inspiring examples and models to imitate. Among them I am thinking in particular of the many whom I have had the pleasure of canonizing and beatifying during my Pontificate. Lastly, may you be assisted by the motherly love of Mary, the faithful Virgin, "after whose example you have consecrated your lives to God" (*Evangelica testificatio*, n. 56) with a "response of love and complete dedication to Christ" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 112).

Please express to your confrères around the world my esteem and gratitude for their witness and service in the Church's universal mission. I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to all the friars of the order wherever they may be and to you, the friars capitular.

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