



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE KNIGHTS
OF THE SOVEREIGN MILITARY ORDER OF MALTA**

Thursday, 19 October 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. I would like to extend a cordial welcome to each of you, Knights and Dames of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, who have come to Rome from every part of the world to celebrate the Great Jubilee. In particular, I greet the Grand Master, Fra Andrew W. N. Bertie, whom I thank for his courteous and noble words to me on behalf of those gathered here. I would also like to extend an affectionate greeting to Cardinal Pio Laghi, Patron of this Sovereign Military Order, who has wished to take part in today's event. With him I greet Mons. Donato de Bonis, your Prelate.

This meeting has special significance because it is being held during the Holy Year 2000 and testifies to the profound communion that joins the members of your Order to the Successor of Peter. On this occasion, I am pleased to express to the Government of the Order, as well as to those who devote themselves generously to the first-aid services at the Roman basilicas and in other Jubilee programmes, my warm appreciation and gratitude for their constant, valuable contribution to the success of the Jubilee.

2. The Great Jubilee, in which the Church is commemorating the second millennium of the Incarnation of the Word, is a "year of grace": a year of the remission of sins and the punishments due to them, a year of reconciliation between disputing parties, a year of manifold conversions and sacramental and extra-sacramental penance. In particular, it is a year which involves "*the granting of indulgences on a larger scale than at other times*" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 14) and the re-establishment of God's justice, a concrete expression of the commandment of love.

In the Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee I wrote: "One sign of the mercy of God which is especially necessary today is the sign of charity, which opens our eyes to the needs of those who are poor and excluded. Such is the situation affecting vast sectors of society and casting its shadow of death upon whole peoples" (*Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 12).

In this regard, I would like here to mention the praiseworthy initiatives that your Order carries out in various areas of moral and spiritual poverty. They are inspired by a great availability to the needy, expressing to them in a visible and concrete way the love of the Lord and of the Church. These projects are at times an effective encouragement and a kind of model for those who want to contribute their efforts to establishing a new world where dignity and hope are restored to whoever is oppressed by modern forms of slavery and wounded in body and spirit.

3. I am referring especially to the prophetic service for the marginalized and excluded which you carry out with the zeal of an authentic battle for the integral advancement of human beings. Thanks to this noble battle for the defence and development of the human person, a mission to which your Order has been dedicated for many centuries, you have been able to raise the banner of love in many parts of the five continents, where sickness and poverty degrade people and, unfortunately, threaten their future.

It is a real strategy of love, which involves you in hospitals, in leprosy clinics, in relief groups, in nursery schools and in rest homes for the elderly. Everywhere you are concerned to carry forward the primary aims of your age-old Order: the "*tuitio fidei*" and the "*obsequium pauperum*", always mindful of the words of your founder, Bl. Gerard: "Our institution will last until God pleases to raise up people who are willing to make suffering lighter and poverty more bearable".

4. Dear brothers and sisters, in this positive context, the special outpouring of grace of the Jubilee year is a renewed occasion of fidelity to Christ and to your brethren for each of you and for your entire spiritual family.

The Jubilee urges you to fix your gaze on Christ, the Redeemer of man, and to welcome him with more and more intense love and awareness. During your Jubilee pilgrimage, you have had the opportunity in a very special way to dedicate yourselves to hearing the Gospel and to prayer, and, by receiving the sacraments, you have wished to renew your fidelity to Christ. It is only from him, the source of eternal life, that you will be able to draw new strength and new energy in the spirit of the Good Samaritan to meet the needs of the poor, ever more evident and tragic in the contemporary world. It is only with his help that you will be able to offer, in every circumstance, responses to the expectations of the poor that are not only skilled, but profoundly inspired by Gospel love.

The Jubilee also encourages you to be constant witnesses of authentic fraternal communion in the areas where you work. It calls you to proclaim Christ's truth with your words and with your lives, so that your presence will be a model of new human and civil harmony for everyone you meet. May your activities be privileged opportunities for evangelization and serve as a sure reference-point for all who seek the kingdom of God and his justice with a sincere heart.

Lastly, may a more intense enthusiasm flow from this Jubilee celebration for each of you, in order to bear witness to the Gospel of charity in a world dominated by selfishness and sin. May your structures be shining outposts of the civilization of love and an effective expression of the Church's social teaching.

With these sentiments, as I entrust each of you, pilgrims of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, to the heavenly protection of the Blessed Virgin, "Comfort of the Afflicted", and of St John the Baptist, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, as a pledge of abundant Jubilee gifts and graces.

I hope the entire Order of Malta will continue to prosper. May the Lord bless you all. Thank you for your visit to Rome and to the Vatican.

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