



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE SERVANTS OF MARY

Friday, 16 February 2001

Dear Sisters,

1. I am pleased to receive you today and I cordially greet Reverend Mother General, Sr Josefa Oyarzábal, as well as her councillors, the others who assist with the governance of the institute and the sisters of the Rome community. You have come to this meeting filled with joy at the various commemorations you are celebrating this year: the 175th anniversary of the birth of your mother foundress, St María Soledad Torres Acosta; the 150th anniversary of the foundation of your institute; and the 125th anniversary of its papal approval. These are fitting occasions for thanking the Lord, who "has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden" (*Lk* 1: 48), and with his gifts has wanted to prepare a spiritual journey of holiness that enriches the Church and is a Gospel leaven in the world. I therefore share your joy and once again express my appreciation of consecrated people, who "have helped to make the mystery and mission of the Church shine forth, and in doing so have contributed to the renewal of society" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 1).

2. I take this opportunity to urge you to be faithful to your founding charism, because it was inspired, through your mother foundress, by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, you should turn to him constantly, in order to recognize the gift of God and receive the living water (cf. *Jn* 4: 10) that sustains the Church's journey through history and makes it fruitful. St María Soledad was very attentive to the Spirit and opened her whole being to God's saving and sanctifying action (cf. *Dominum et vivificantem*, n. 58), when, faced with what seemed a mere charitable need of her era, she discovered the call to bear witness to the presence of God's kingdom in the world through one of its unequivocal signs: I was "sick and you visited me" (*Mt* 25: 36).

Although some circumstances have changed since then, Christ continues to show himself today in

all the faces that speak to us of poverty, loneliness and suffering. It is necessary, then, to maintain a great spirit of prayer and intimacy with God, who gives life to the specific service you perform, since "the Christ encountered in contemplation is the same who lives and suffers in the poor" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 82).

Moreover, the particular nature of your primary task, free care of the sick in their own homes, takes on new meaning in our times where the reality of illness or death is often concealed in daily life. With this service you eloquently proclaim that illness is neither an unbearable burden for human beings nor does it deprive patients of their full dignity as persons. On the contrary, it can become an enriching experience for the sick and for their whole family. In this way, by holding out a hand to the sick, your mission also helps to keep families together and discreetly supports cohesion in the home, where no one should feel he is a burden.

The charism you have inherited, then, directs you to a future in which the Church is called to "carry on the tradition of charity which has expressed itself in so many different ways in the past two millennia, but which today calls for even greater resourcefulness" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 50). You have before you the challenge of a humanity in which so many of our brethren, in addition to effective help in life's delicate moments, especially need respect, closeness and solidarity (cf. *ibid.*).

3. Therefore I urge you to live the celebrations of this year, at the beginning of a new millennium, as a providential occasion for revitalizing your personal commitment and your work, which has already spread to Africa, America and Europe. You know well that authentic renewal occurs when "the more personal their dedication to the Lord Jesus is, the more fraternal their community life, and the more ardent their involvement in the institute's specific mission" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 72).

I ask the Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick, to accompany you in your efforts and to visit homes with you, in order to show them Jesus, the true Saviour and Redeemer of every human being through his sacrifice on the Cross and his glorious Resurrection.

As I invoke the intercession of St Soledad Torres Acosta for each of her daughters, I cordially give you my Apostolic Blessing and gladly extend it to all your sisters, the Servants of Mary, Ministers of the Sick.