



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE AUGUSTINIAN SISTERS,
SERVANTS OF JESUS AND MARY**

Monday, 22 January 2001

Dear Sisters!

1. I am pleased to receive you today and to offer my cordial welcome to you at the conclusion of the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of the death of Mother Maria Teresa Spinelli, foundress of your religious congregation. I greet you all with affection. I would like to extend a special greeting to the Superior General, Mother Atanasia Buhagiar, to her councillors and to all who in various ways form the organizing committee for the centenary celebrations. With this visit you would like to reaffirm your sincere devotion to the Vicar of Christ and full adherence to his Magisterium in the spirit of your foundress, whose legacy to you is to maintain unreserved fidelity to the Successor of Peter.

You rightly regard this extraordinary woman with deep admiration. She was born in Rome in 1789 and made her religious profession in 1827. She knew how to imitate St Rita of Cascia with humility and generosity. I am sure that your return to the sources of her spirituality and work, as you did this year, will stir in each of you a deep awareness of the validity and timeliness of her apostolic method. You will thus be able to make a significant contribution to the task of the new evangelization, which concerns the entire Ecclesial Community.

2. During this important anniversary you intend to reflect on the charismatic insights that marked the birth of your religious family. This return to your roots, which the Church insistently recommends to religious institutes, is not a nostalgic look at the past. Rather, it is a resumption of the original commitment in the present day with renewed enthusiasm, while preserving unaltered the founders' spirit, but with all the appropriate adaptations required by the changed needs of the times.

The Holy Year has just ended and with the Apostolic *Letter Novo millennio ineunte* I wanted to invite the Church to "put out into the deep". I repeat this to you, dear sisters: we must set out anew from Christ! Yes, this is also a priority commitment for you. Do not turn your gaze from the Lord's face: contemplate him in ceaseless prayer and serve him through charitable work among the young and the needy.

Make it your effort to harmonize the contemplative dimension with missionary zeal, which are the two fundamental pillars of your religious identity, in accordance with Mother Spinelli's engaging example.

3. Those who remain in constant contact with the Lord are better able to respond to people's expectations, especially of those in difficulty. "Christ encountered in contemplation is the same who lives and suffers in the poor" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 82). This was well understood by your foundress, who drew from it the incentive to offer the warmth of a family to so many children deprived of their natural one. Only those who have personally met Christ can speak of him effectively to the hearts of their brethren and lead them to experience his friendship so deeply that they feel interiorly moved and transformed by him.

Your mother foundress and her first companions, imbued with Augustinian spirituality, were able to achieve a form of communion modeled on that of the first apostolic community. You too must continue to walk this path, deeply mindful that the centrality of fraternal life, expressed in the *Rule* of Augustine of Hippo, is summed up in truly being "*cor unum et anima una in Deum*".

4. Dear sisters, you are a living part of the Church, and your mother foundress liked to repeat: "With all my heart I offer God my life, to spend myself for the good of the Church and of poor sinners". Follow her example; walk in her footsteps, daily praying in community for all who are striving to preserve the faith and spread the Gospel message.

I implore the continual help of the Blessed Virgin for each of you, so that, assisted by her, the Mother and model of all consecration, you may be faithful to your vocation.

With these wishes, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to the General Council, to the members of your religious family and to all who have joined you for this important Jubilee anniversary.