



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE 18th GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE SCHOOL SISTERS OF ST FRANCIS**

Friday, 6 July 2001

My dear Sisters,

1. I am happy to bid a cordial welcome to each of you, gathered in Rome for the 18th General Chapter of the Congregation of the School Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St Francis. My thoughts are particularly with Sr Maria Luceta Macik, the Superior General, and the General Council.

With this visit to the Successor of Peter, which you so ardently desired, you have wanted to give expression to your fidelity to the Vicar of Christ and your intention to face with renewed enthusiasm the challenges of today's apostolate. This engagement responds to an important dimension of your charism, which for some time now has led you to take on a greater missionary thrust. In order to bring the Good News of the Gospel, you have gone to the distant regions of Africa, the Americas and Asia, as well as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my great pleasure for the generosity with which you participate in the Church's mission in serving the poor and encourage you to continue the good work you have begun, following the Franciscan tradition of living the Gospel "*sine glossa*".

It was in this spirit that Mother Frances Antonia Lampel began your religious family in Graz, Austria, in 1843, and it was in her wake that Mother Mary Hyacinth Zahalka continued with a new foundation in Bohemia. These two women enriched with a new branch the immense tree planted by the *Poverello* of Assisi; with your congregation, entirely centred on Christ as he is listened to in the Gospel, celebrated and adored in the Eucharist, and served in the little ones. Taking inspiration from the essential nature typical of Franciscanism, your Rule revolves around the four

fundamental compass points, represented by penance, contemplative prayer, poverty and humility. It is further specified through attention to the great values of simplicity and fraternity that make you ready to reach out to those afflicted by any type of poverty and to build peace in every social context.

Offering particular enlightenment for your missionary style is a saying of your foundress: "I am here with God for you". You recall it often, and rightly so, that it may encourage you to a life dedicated entirely to the service of the Lord and your neighbour.

2. Indeed, today your specific charism, constituted by the educational mission, demands creativity and generosity to reach out to people, wherever they may be, and promote their integral development, giving them a Christian education.

The grace of the Great Jubilee, by which the Lord wanted to prepare the Church to face the challenges of the new millennium in an unprecedented season of evangelization, impels each of you to make courageous choices, with the wisdom of the scribe described in the Gospel, who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old (cf. Mt 13,52).

These choices require first and foremost a profound sense of belonging to Christ that, as I wrote in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, is not "some magic formula. No, we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: *I am with you!*" (n. 29).

Christ himself, "who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem" (*ibid.*), must be the centre of every program, every pastoral plan, and any "updating" of religious life. With him alone is it possible to "set out into the deep" towards new horizons of history, and to forge ahead with hope, although facing problems and difficulties which at times seem impossible to overcome. Yes, it is only with your gaze fixed on Christ that today, you too could focus on your spiritual identity. And this, indeed, is the theme for reflection during your General Chapter, which I hope will bring you the desired religious and pastoral results.

3. When you look at the many expectations and plans that characterize your day to day activity, you should always keep in mind that every choice and every programme runs the risk of failing unless it is rooted in an individual and communal search for holiness. The desire for holiness, "this high standard of ordinary Christian living" (*ibid.*, n. 31.), will help you to translate into consistent actions your commitment to the inculturation of the Gospel, as well as to bring peace to the complex situations in which you live, often dominated by the logic of violence and death.

If, faithful to your Franciscan charism, you want to witness to the great commandment of love, living it with joy and persevering patience, your communities and your works must be authentic homes and schools of fraternity, where the spirituality of communion emerges as a style of life and

basic principle of education. To that end, you appreciate the contribution of all your sisters, including the elderly, who are the bearers of a great patrimony of experience and maturity.

From your witness and prayer will spring, I am certain, the flowering of vocations which you desire, which will in turn give new sap and abundant fruit to the ancient and fertile tree of your institute. Be especially mindful that contemplation and listening to the Word of God are the interior force of every form of apostolic activity and the heartbeat of a fervent and balanced religious life.

In your daily spiritual and missionary commitment may the Virgin Mary be close to you, as a teacher of faith and hope. To her I entrust your educational mission, your desire to serve your brothers and sisters, as well as the work and the generous proposals of the General Chapter that you are celebrating.

Through the intercession of Sts Francis and Clare of Assisi, I ask the Lord to give his heavenly gifts of peace and all good to your Congregation, and I cordially impart to you, to all your sisters, and to all those entrusted to your pastoral care a special Apostolic Blessing.