



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY
OF AFRICAN MISSIONS**

Saturday, 19 May 2001

*To the Superior General
and Members of the Society of African Missions*

Extending to all of you a warm welcome on the occasion of your General Assembly, I offer a special greeting to your newly-elected Superior General, Father Kieran O'Reilly, whom I thank for his kind words on your behalf. I greet as well his immediate predecessor, Father Daniel Cardot, who has led your Society for the past six years.

As you approach the end of your first General Assembly of the new millennium, I encourage you to draw abundantly upon the rich spiritual legacy of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 as you renew your commitment to mission and evangelization. A new century, a new millennium has begun in the light of Christ, but, as I wrote in my Apostolic Letter at the close of the Great Jubilee, "not everyone can see this light. Ours is the wonderful and demanding task of becoming its 'reflection'" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 54). In a world where there are many lights that distract from and are even contrary to the pure light of Christ, you must strive always to be more like Jesus — nourishing yourselves on his word and being firmly rooted in prayer and contemplation — so that you may faithfully reflect his light and effectively make him known to others.

I am pleased to see young missionary priests from Africa and Asia among your numbers today; this is a positive indication of the growing international character of your society. Continue to promote and nurture missionary vocations, for "preaching the Gospel requires preachers; the harvest needs labourers" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 79). Your efforts to involve the laity in your missionary work is another essential element in the *plantatio Ecclesiae* in mission lands, for it is through a mature and responsible laity that the Christian message and the example of Christian

holiness pass more immediately into the life of society. In imitation of our Lord and Master, renew your commitment to working with the poor, especially refugees who so urgently need a sign of God's love. Accept the challenge of interreligious dialogue, a path to which the Church must dedicate greater attention in this new millennium. Defend human life at every stage of its existence, from conception to natural death, and do not fail to make people more aware of their responsibility to transform their communities and cultures in accordance with the saving truths of the Gospel.

Dear Friends, it is my desire on the occasion of our brief meeting to encourage you in your missionary undertaking and to exhort you to be true to the spirit which you have received from your Founder, the Servant of God Marion de Brésillac. Filled with hope and enthusiasm, therefore, go forward confidently to meet the challenges of the new millennium, looking always to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who ever remains "the radiant dawn and sure guide for our steps" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 58). To you here present and to all the members and friends of the Society of African Missions I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.