



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE ORDER OF THE FRIARS SERVANTS OF MARY

*To the Very Reverend Father HUBERT M. MOONS
Prior General of the Order of Friar Servants of Mary*

"The Grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 16,23). With these words of the Apostle Paul I greet you and the whole Order of Friar Servants of Mary on the occasion of your General Chapter at Ariccia (8-30 October 2001).

You have chosen "Together with Mary, from hearing God's word to life-giving service" as the theme for your Chapter and it highlights the need to give witness that is both faithful to your original charism and responsive to the needs of contemporary mankind.

Very Reverend Father, I send you my cordial greetings and sincere thanks for your twelve years of service to the Order as Prior General. I greet all the participants of your General Chapter and through them all the members of your religious family, and send each of you a word of encouragement along with the assurance that you are always in my prayers.

You have sought guidance from the Holy Spirit for your Chapter, I am certain, and have prepared this meeting with great care, defining priorities and choosing subjects for discussion. The Chapter provides us with an occasion to stress certain elements of Our Lady's participation in the mystery of Christ and the Church that can inspire the choices and decisions you make. From its very origin the Order of Friar Servants of Mary has seen Our Lady as the Star that guides their journey, the frame of reference for their every apostolate.

1. *With Mary seeking God.* Seeking God is an essential component of consecrated life. Mary is our most certain guide in this quest. Seek the Lord! You have made this the object of your reflection it is the heart of your vocation it is the first item on your Chapter agenda. Yes! Seek Christ, seek his face (cf. Ps 27,8). Seek him daily from dawn (cf. Ps 63,2), with your whole heart (cf. Dt 4,29; Ps

119,2). Seek him with the tenacity of the Shulamite woman (cf. Sg 3,1-3), the wonder of the Apostle Andrew (cf. Jn 1,35-39) and the eagerness of Mary Magdalene (Jn 20, 1-18).

In the Ritual for the Celebration of a Chapter, you invoke the memory of the Seven Holy Founders as "Seekers after God". This is exactly what they were: they sought the Kingdom of God and his righteousness (Mt 6, 33), they sought the wisdom of the Gospel tirelessly. Following their example you too seek the Lord in the hour of your joy and in the time of your desolation. You imitate the anxious Mary seeking her twelve-year-old son in Jerusalem (Lk 2, 44-49); or the beginning of her son's public ministry, when Mary went looking for him (Mk 3,32) worried by the rumours concerning him (Mk 3,20-21).

To realize the need to seek God is something for which we should be grateful. In reality it is God who seeks us out he it is who has first loved us (I Jn 4, 10). Seeking God can be a source of consolation but it is also demanding: we must be prepared for renunciation and radical choices.

What does all this mean for you in your present situation? It implies renewed emphasis on contemplation, an intensification of personal prayer, a re-evaluation of the silence of the heart.

There is no opposition between contemplation and action, between prayer in one's cell and liturgical celebrations, between the necessary "flight from the world" and the need to stand with those who suffer all of these things are present in the traditions of your Order and in your Constitutions (cf. *Const. OSM* [1987] 16a, 31a-b. 116). Experience teaches us that fervent and effective apostolic action is the fruit of intense contemplation.

2. *With Mary listening to the voice of God.* Hearing the Saving Word is closely connected with the quest for God. Mary is an example and a guide on this journey. The Church emphasizes her unique relationship to the Word. Our Lady is the "Virgin who listens". With humility and wisdom she is eager and ready to take the Angel's message to heart. With her *fiat* she welcomes the Son of God; through her the Subsistent Word becomes incarnate for the salvation of the world.

Lectio Divina which you hold in great esteem is an especially appropriate method for listening to the Word. There is an explicit mention of this practice in the formula for solemn profession: you commit yourselves to a life of "listening to the Word of God" (*Rituale della professione religiosa dei Frati Servi di S. Maria [Ritual of the religious profession of the Friars Servants of Mary]*, Second printed edition, 211, Rome, General Curia OSM, 1993, pp. 128-148). Mary listens and accepts the Word into her heart before it enters her virginal womb. In imitation of her *fiat* (cf. Lk 1,38), you too pronounce your total yes to the God who reveals himself (Rom 16,26). In the words of Holy Scripture God reveals the riches of his love; he unveils his plan of salvation and charges each of us with a specific mission in his kingdom.

Love for his Word will move you to re-think community prayer, to give special attention to your

liturgical life to make it a more heartfelt and shared experience. Let your community prayer be such that your personal prayer becomes a preparation for and extension of the liturgy you celebrate in common. In this way the words of the Apostle will become a reality in your Order: "May the Word of Christ dwell among you in abundance" (Col 3,16).

3. *With Mary in a life of service.* The second priority of the General Chapter is an examination of the various forms of your apostolic service. To serve the Church and mankind is an essential part of the charism of the Friar Servants of Mary. With eyes fixed on Our Lady the humble and eager handmaid of the Lord, each member of the Order is imbued with zeal, energy and a cheerful concern for his brothers. You are sensitive to human needs and appreciate the value of human relationships.

Your style is not primarily concerned with efficiency and technological progress rather you rely on the efficacy of God's grace (I Cor 3,6-7). You read the signs of the times and weigh the possibility of suspending certain activities to respond to new missionary needs in Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. Stay true to the original inspiration of your religious family, founded to "bear witness to the human and evangelical values seen in Mary" (*Const. OSM*, 7). In the mendicant spirit of your Order learn to live with that sense of transience and insecurity found in the Gospel; be ready to go wherever there is need (*ibid.*, 3).

Among the many forms of service mentioned in the outline of your Chapter, there is "service to life". In a world where a culture of death predominates you are servants of life faithful to a God who "is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Mt 22,32). You are heralds of the Gospel of hope under the protection of Mary the "Mother of Life".

4. *With Mary in promoting vocations.* Finally the Chapter should consider vocation recruiting something of great interest and urgency. We must pray ceaselessly for vocations; they are a gift to the Order and to the Church. May the image of Our Lady at Pentecost guide your considerations. In the cenacle Mary is represented as *Orans* (praying). Together with the apostles she is calling down the Holy Spirit the source of every vocation. Mary is *the Mother of the Church*: in the cenacle the Virgin begins to exercise her motherhood toward the community of disciples, which her dying Son entrusted to her care on the cross.

Along with prayer (Lk 10,2), the consistent and faithful witness of all those who are called to radical evangelical discipleship produce vocations. Future generations look to you and are attracted to consecrated life not because it is "easy" but because it lives the Gospel without compromise.

The seventh of October 2001, marks the 750th anniversary of that "*Act of Poverty*" of the first community on Mount Senario. With that act of generosity your friars committed themselves to possessing nothing like the Master who "had no place to rest his head" (Lk 9,58). May the memory

of this event move you to give an ever more authentic witness to poverty by living modestly (cf. *Const. OSM*, 57) and by sharing your possessions.

I entrust the work of your Chapter to the maternal care of Our Lady the Queen of her Servants. I assure you of my prayers and cordially impart to you, to all the members of the Chapter and to the entire Servite Family my Apostolic Blessing, as a pledge of the Lord's infinite mercy.

From the Vatican, 29 September 2001.

JOHN PAUL II

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