



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE HANDMAIDS OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

Saturday, 2 March 2002

Dear Sisters,

1. As you celebrate your 17th General Congregation in Rome, an especially important event for you, I cordially greet you and invite you to listen with docility to the voice of the Spirit, to discover the ways that will permit you to live today, in creative fidelity to the founding charism, full consecration to the Lord and your mission of unconditional service to the Church.

Moreover, the forthcoming commemoration of the 125th anniversary of the institute must be an extraordinary occasion to give a new impetus to the desire so often repeated by your Mother Foundress, St Rafaela Maria, that the life of each sister might be "woven entirely of faith and generosity". In Rome, where you venerate her relics, may the whisper of her voice, the warmth of her devotion for the Eucharist and the vigour of her burning desire to "make Christ adored by all peoples" guide you in your work and deliberations.

2. In union with the whole Church, you have proposed at this General Congregation to develop directives that will help you "put out into the deep" at the beginning of the third millennium, combining the profound union with the Person of Christ and the contemplation of his mercy, expressed in the highest order in his Sacred Heart, with the responsibility to collaborate intensely with his saving action among the men and women of today. This indispensable interaction between a deep spiritual life and the work of evangelization is particularly important for all consecrated persons with an apostolic outreach, in whom "*close union between contemplation and action will allow today as yesterday, the most difficult missions to be undertaken*" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 74).

Many of you and your sisters have a vast experience of the problems they meet in carrying out

their mission on the four continents where your institute is present. Some of them acquire tragic dimensions, because of danger, conditions of extreme poverty or injustice, while others stem from social environments that are particularly insensitive to the spirit of the Beatitudes to which the sisters are called to give witness (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 31). However, occasions are not lacking in which persons and even communities suffer from obstacles to the full identification with their mission, when they are tempted at times by boredom when carrying out activities that are not highly regarded nor in the short-term very productive. In these cases too, the authentic spirit of service must be revived by living joyfully the radical option of seeking and doing God's will before anything else, so characteristic of the Ignatian tradition in which your Institute is founded. "In the cause of the Kingdom, there is no time for looking back, and even less for settling into laziness" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 15).

For this reason I desire to express to you the gratitude of the Church for your service to evangelization, both through your witness of life and through the activities you carry out in the various sectors of education, the care of spirituality centres, pastoral care of the young and the promotion of the less favoured of society. However, with the gratitude there come the hope and the invitation to develop a new creativity in charity, so necessary for the Church's mission, which is measured not so much by its external newness or apparent effectiveness, as by being in activity, forms and methods true fraternal sharing (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 50).

3. I would like to conclude by entrusting to the Virgin Mary the fruit of your Congregation and the future of your Institute. May she be the model of joyful docility to God's will, proper to his "lowly handmaid" (cf. Lk 1,48), teacher of how to accompany Christ in every moment of his life and mission, even to the Cross (cf. Jn 19,26), and who intercedes in times of difficulty or uncertainty.

With these sentiments and imploring the protection of St Ignatius of Loyola and of St Rafaela Maria, I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing, which I am happy to extend to all your sisters, Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.