



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE FRIARS MINOR

Monday, 16 June 2003

Dear Friars Minor,

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of your Ordinary General Chapter that is taking place at the Portiuncula chapel in Assisi. I address my cordial greeting to the new Minister General, Fr José Rodríguez Carballo, and as I thank him for his courteous words expressing your common sentiments, I offer him my fervent good wishes for the success of his work in the demanding office that has been entrusted to him.

I extend my greeting to his predecessor, Fr Giacomo Bini, to those present, to all your Confreres, and in particular to all the sick and elderly friars, as well as to the young men who are the hope of your Order for the good of the Church.

2. In accordance with the ancient tradition, the Chapter you are celebrating is known as the "Pentecost Chapter", after the Solemnity close to which it has taken place right from the start. This circumstance, as I wrote in the Message I addressed to you, highlights "the fundamental role of the Holy Spirit, as St Francis recognized, and whom he liked to describe as the "Minister General" of the Order (cf. Celano, *Vita Secunda*, CXLV, 193). The Holy Spirit purifies, enlightens and inflames hearts with the fire of love, leading them to the Father in the footprints of the Lord Jesus (cf. *Lettera a Tutti i Frati*, VI, 62-63, n. 1)".

Every General Chapter is a time of special grace for the religious family celebrating it; a favourable opportunity to reflect on the progress achieved and to make decisions and draw up guidelines for the future. May the Holy Spirit enable you to understand more clearly the priorities of the mission that God entrusts to you for the good of the Church and of the world.

3. At the dawn of the third millennium, Christ's disciples have a keener and deeper awareness of the urgent need for the new evangelization. Your Communities also share in this apostolic desire, and the friars are determined, faithful to their vocation, to bring to the men and women of our time the glad tidings of salvation which Christ offers to humanity.

This missionary commitment will be fruitful to the extent that it takes place in harmony with the legitimate Pastors, to whom the Lord has entrusted the responsibility for his flock. I am pleased to highlight in this regard the efforts made to overcome the difficulties that have existed for some time in certain areas. I wholeheartedly hope that with the contribution of all, you will reach that understanding with the diocesan Authority which my venerable Predecessor Pope Paul VI requested, and which is indispensable for an effective evangelization.

Dear Friars Minor, be true to your distinctive style, marked by poverty and fraternal life, docility and obedience, keeping your gaze fixed on Christ, like the "Poverello" of Assisi, your father and teacher. He teaches that "preachers must first attain in the secrecy of prayer what they later express in their homilies. They must first be warm inwardly, so as not to offer cold words outwardly" (cf. Celano, *Vita Secunda*, CXXII, 163).

4. Aspire to holiness! This is a truly urgent pastoral necessity in our time. In this regard I noted in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* that "the time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living" (n. 31). To help others seek God above all things, dear Friars, you must be the first to commit yourselves to that arduous but exalting personal and community ascesis, finding in your Rule and Constitutions "a map for the whole journey of discipleship, in accordance with a specific charism confirmed by the Church" (*Vita Consecrata*, n. 37).

May the work of the Chapter, supported by the Prayer of the entire Order, contribute to the growth of that spirit of humble listening to God and filial adherence to the directives of the Pastors of the Church which must distinguish Friars Minor. May St Francis and the Holy Protectors of the Order help you.

May the Virgin Mary accompany you, she whom you venerate as your special Patroness with the title of "Immaculate". May she, the "Star of the New Evangelization", make you always ready to respond with devotion to the call of her divine Son. The Pope is close to you and cordially blesses you, your Fraternities and your entire spiritual Family.