



The Holy See

**LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO MOTHER COLETTE LIGNON
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST CENTENTARY
OF THE ROMAN UNION OF THE ORDER OF ST URSULA**

To Reverend Mother Colette Lignon

Prioress General of the Roman Union of the Order of St Ursula

1. You have the joy of celebrating your institute's first centenary in the heart of the Great Jubilee year of Our Lord's birth. This anniversary recalls the happy initiative of my venerable predecessor, Pope Leo XIII, to join into one union the many monasteries of Ursulines who had spread throughout the world since the foundation of the first community by St Angela Merici in 1535. The birth of your union on 28 November 1900 and its rapid development gave new energy to your religious family, which has thus been enriched with various apostolic experiences. The commemoration of this event is an invitation to your order to deepen your charism in fidelity to St Angela's example and teachings, and to build and prepare the future by mobilizing your forces for evangelization.

2. Since the 16th century, the need for evangelization and the Lord's appeals have led your sisters to almost every continent, so that today you have a truly international dimension. This experience marks the life of your union and enables you to share truly in the experience of the Church herself, a communion of faith and life among all believers, so that "he who lives in Rome knows that those in the Indies are his members" (cf. *St John Chrysostom, Homilies on St John*, 65, 1). If the concern for unity and communion is the duty of all Christians, who constantly recall the Lord's own desire "that they may all be one" (Jn 17: 21), this mission is especially incumbent on those who have chosen, in response to a special call from the Lord, to live in common according to the rules of fraternal life. I therefore urge you to be ever more attentive to this dimension of ecclesial communion, watching over the quality of your involvement in the local Churches and putting your gifts at their service out of concern for an ever more intense cooperation.

3. Over time the Ursuline Sisters have acquired a solid educational experience, particularly in the service of young people, whether in the vast sphere of catechesis, both directly and through the formation of competent catechists who

are concerned to transmit an experience of Christian life and sound teaching, or in the multiple sectors of education. This task of transmitting the faith through forceful, reasoned and coherent instruction that gives an account of our hope (cf. 1 *Pt* 3: 15), and also through the witness and example of a life given to the service of the Lord and his Church, is essential in today's world, where so many young people no longer have the solid reference-points that family upbringing used to give them. As a result, schools and the entire educational community must take responsibility for an important part of this overall education in a truly evangelical spirit, not only through catechesis but also through the many other ways of accompanying young people, such as appropriate movements or groups for reflection and sharing. To form disciples of Christ in this way, so that they can bear witness in their family, professional and social life to the spiritual and moral values that the Gospel has implanted in the human heart, is an indispensable task if the new evangelization is to bear abundant fruits in the century now beginning. In this perspective, it is particularly important to serve the very poor, those "little ones" whom the Lord wants to put in the first place and whom our societies, too often marked by a desire for wealth and competition, tend to exclude from economic growth and social organization.

4. To proclaim the kingdom of God is the first mission which the Church entrusts to all whom the sacrament of Baptism gives a share in the death and resurrection of Christ, Prophet, Priest and King. The consecrated life, which you have chosen, is a privileged path in the Church to express the prophetic and eschatological dimension of the Gospel message: it "reveals more clearly to all believers the heavenly goods which are already present in this age, witnessing to the new and eternal life which we have acquired through the redemptive work of Christ and prelude to our future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 44). I encourage you to deepen this prophetic dimension for the contemporary world and to make the signs of the kingdom to come visible by your taste for prayer, which is always the source of our Christian life, by your fraternal life, which is itself prophecy in action (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 85), by your explicit witness and by your missionary concern.

5. Proclaiming the kingdom does not deter the Church from her mission in the world. On the contrary, like the prophet appointed to watch over the house of Israel (cf. *Ez* 3: 17), she must be urgent "in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort ... unflinching in patience and in teaching" (2 *Tm* 4: 2). Like the Lord Jesus himself with the pilgrims from Emmaus (cf. *Lk* 24: 13-35), the Church walks on the road of mankind and with them shares their questions about the meaning of life, tells them the Word of the Lord and gradually reveals his presence to them, in order to lead them to full knowledge of his love revealed in the wealth of the sacramental life entrusted to her. I urge you fearlessly to make this pilgrimage of faith with your brothers and sisters, letting yourselves be transformed little by little by the Lord's Word. By always thirsting in your hearts for the living God, who spurs you to live in loving intimacy with him (cf. *Ps* 62: 2), but also by listening to the appeals of your brothers and sisters and by giving yourselves to them every day, you will proclaim the merciful love of the Lord who gives himself.

6. The centenary you are celebrating is an occasion for all your communities to thank the Lord for all his benefits. May the grace of the Jubilee rekindle in every sister of your Union the desire for holiness through renewed conversion! As I offer my particular wishes for your forthcoming General Chapter, I entrust the members of the Roman Union of the Order of St Ursula to the motherly protection of the Virgin Mary and cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to them.

From the Vatican, 10 November 2000.

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