



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE FRIARS MINOR ON THE OCCASION OF THE
1st INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF UNIVERSITY RECTORS
AND DIRECTORS OF FRANCISCAN RESEARCH CENTRES**

Dear Brothers,

1. I am delighted to greet you on the occasion of the first International Congress of the University Rectors and Directors of Franciscan research Centres, organized by your religious family's General Secretariate for Formation and Studies. First of all, I want to greet Fr Giacomo Bini, Minister General of the Order, and those of you who are in charge of the various academic institutions. I then extend my affectionate greeting to the entire Order of Friars Minor.

In meeting you I call to mind the simple and luminous faith of Francis, which prompted him to promise "*obedience and reverence to Pope Honorius and to his canonically elected successors and to the Roman Church*" (St Francis, *Regula Bullata*, I, 3), as well as to the "poor priests of this world, in the parishes in which they live" (St Francis, *Testament*, 9).

After the Most High God revealed to him that he was to live according to the holy Gospel (cf. *ibid.*, n. 17), Francis felt the need to pay a visit to the Successor of Peter to be confirmed in his decision. You too, wishing to deepen and actualize your cultural, philosophical and theological heritage, would like to receive a word of encouragement today from the one whom divine Providence has placed at the helm of Christ's Church.

I am pleased to repeat what I said on the occasion of the General Chapter of your Order in 1991, when I drew your attention especially to the formation of the intellect which, as one cannot fail to see, is a fundamental prerequisite of evangelization. The ancient motto "*fides quaerens intellectum, intellectus quaerens fidem*" is always timely. An authentic faith seeks knowledge of the mysteries, just as a healthy use of the intelligence benefits substantially from the light of faith. In fact, only an intelligent faith, aware of itself and its reasons, can maintain the decision to live

according to the Gospel. Only study illumined by faith, the quest to know God more deeply, can lead to union with Christ, give a solid basis to personal vocation and prepare for the mission. Study, as is said in the *Ratio studiorum*, is therefore "fundamental to the life and to the formation, both continuing and initial, of every Friar Minor" (n. 3).

2. Since the earliest times of your history, faith that lovingly seeks knowledge of the divine mysteries has occupied the mind and lives of eminent theologians, such as St Bonaventure and Bl. John Duns Scotus, while great popular preachers, such as St Anthony of Padua and St Bernardino of Siena, drew constant nourishment from the sources of theology, the ecclesial science *par excellence*.

Even though St Francis out of humility agreed to be described as "a simpleton and an idiot" (cf. *Of True and Perfect Joy*) in his *In Praise of Virtue* he says: "Hail Queen Wisdom, may the Lord save you with your sister, holy pure simplicity" (n. 1). To Friar Anthony of Padua he did not hesitate to answer: "I am pleased that you are teaching sacred theology to the friars, as long as in this occupation you do not extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion, as is written in the Rule" (*Letter to Friar Anthony*, 2).

Those who reject or lose interest in the "true Wisdom of the Father" which is the incarnate Word (cf. St Francis, *Letter to all the faithful*, X), do not possess that "*pure and holy simplicity*" loved and hailed by Francis; it belongs instead to those who, with a prayerful heart, explore the paths of wisdom revealed and devote themselves to expressing it in life, rejecting the wisdom of the world that "wishes and cares much for words, but little for work" (St Francis, *Regula Non Bullata* XVII, 11-12).

3. The study of theology and the other disciplines, as your recent *Ratio studiorum* says, constitutes an "itinerary, a way to be enlightened by God in mind and heart, hence to be witnesses, preachers and servants of Truth and Goodness" (n. 13).

Is not the recent establishment of the Faculties of Biblical Sciences and of Archaeology in your Biblical Institute in Jerusalem a significant invitation to renew with Francis the commitment to observe, and later to spread everywhere "the fragrant words of the Lord Jesus Christ" that are "spirit and life"? (St Francis, *Letter to all the faithful*, XI).

As a guiding password for your convention you have chosen "*Francis, go and repair my house*". It is only by listening to the Word become alive in our lives that we give grateful praise to God and offer the real Gospel witness that believers must strive to live every day. From the great deposit of theology and Franciscan wisdom, satisfactory answers can be found, even to humanity's dramatic questions at the beginning of the third Christian millennium.

Francis sang of a divine and fraternal creation where all sister creatures "sing the glory of God"

and serve one another, following a plan that man is called to discover, respect and promote, overcoming the ancient temptation "to be like God". The man of Assisi proclaims the value of poverty, in a world where the sin of human greed continues to bar the poor from banquet laid out by "our Sister Mother Earth" for all God's children. He reminds us that the Word of the Father "willed, with His most Blessed Mother, to choose poverty" (*Letter to all the faithful*, I), and living in poverty, dependent on the aid of others, he has taught us that "alms is an inheritance and a right which is due to the poor; which Our Lord Jesus Christ purchased for us" (*Regula Non Bullata*, IX, 10). The poor are entitled to partake of the banquet which the "great Almoner" wants to be open "to all, worthy and unworthy" (cf. Celano, *Vita seconda*, 77).

4. Dear Friars Minor! May this important congress be a favourable opportunity for you to commemorate the past and look with foresight to the future. From the great spiritual heritage of the "Franciscan school" draw concrete and practical guidelines for the intellectual formation and promotion of studies in the Order, so as to respond to the demands of your vocation today. It is the duty of your universities and research centres to bring about a fruitful encounter between the Gospel and the various cultural expressions of our time, to reach out towards our contemporaries who are thirsting for answers rooted in the Gospel values. As you follow the example of St Francis and the great cultural tradition of the Franciscan Order, make it your care to place the Gospel at the heart of culture and of contemporary history.

In this itinerary, which is at once cultural and spiritual, may you be supported by Our "Lady, most holy Queen, Mother of God, Mary" (St Francis, *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 1), and assisted by the saints of the Franciscan family. I support you with prayer, as I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you and to all who are entrusted to your pastoral care.

From Castel Gandolfo, 19 September 2001.

JOHN PAUL II