



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II

TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE SECOND WORLD CONGRESS

ON CONSECRATED LIFE *Dear Brothers and Sisters*,¹. I would like to extend my cordial greeting to you all, called by God with a special vocation to follow Christ more closely. At the end of the World Congress on Consecrated Life that has been taking place during these days in Rome, it is a cause of joy for me to be able to send a special Message to all of you who have been taking part: to the Presidents of the men's and women's Conferences of Major Superiors, to the men and women Superiors General and to all of you, consecrated men and women, who have gathered here in these days to question yourselves on the problems and prospects that characterize your choice of life today.² The hearts of our contemporaries are sometimes impoverished by no longer being able to assess their own poverty. Our time sets before us practically unheard of forms of injustice and exploitation as well as the selfish wrong-doing of individuals or groups. In many, this leads to that "dimming of hope" of which I spoke in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* (cf. n. 7). In this situation, consecrated persons are called to offer bewildered humanity, weary and lacking in memory, a credible witness of Christian hope, making "visible the love of God who abandons no one... [and] giving those who have lost their way real reasons for continuing to hope" (*ibid.*, n. 84). "We toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God" (1 Tim 4: 10).³ Before a society in which there is often no room to express love freely, consecrated men and women are called to witness to the logic of the disinterested gift of self: indeed, their choice is expressed "in a radical gift of self for love of the Lord Jesus and, in him, of every member of the human family" (Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, n. 3). Consecrated life must safeguard a patrimony of life and beauty that can quench every thirst, bind every sore, soothe every wound, fulfilling every desire for joy and love, freedom and peace.⁴ "*Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity*": this was the theme that guided your reflection at the Congress. During it, you clearly expressed your commitment to set out continually from Christ to learn to love your neighbour as he was loved by Christ, who "came not to be served but serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10: 45). The Carmelite mystic, St Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi, transported by her love for the divine Bridegroom, called upon the souls of consecrated men and women to love Love, a Love unloved: "O souls, created of love and for love, why do you not love Love?"; and she implored Love: "O Love, who are not loved or known. Love, make all creatures love you, O Love" (*PR* 2, 188-189). This love, this burning ardour for Christ and for souls, this unquenchable thirst for divine love and this desire to take it to all men and women must constantly nourish your effort for personal conversion, holiness and evangelization.⁵ All of you, consecrated men and women, are called to follow Christ more closely and to have his very sentiments in your hearts (cf. Phil 2: 5), to learn from him, meek and humble of heart (cf. Mt 11: 29), to do the Father's will with him (cf. Jn 6: 38) and to follow him on the way of the Cross. For the disciple, this is the only path. There is no other. Every day, with a joyful and grateful spirit, he or she must set out on the narrow road in the Teacher's footsteps, in order to draw the needed energy from the source from which flows the water of life that never dies. You must open your hearts to the life-giving breath of

the Holy Spirit, to compete with one another in fraternal love and service, to open your doors to the weakest, the loneliest and the rejected. In this dawn of the Third Christian Millennium, the witness of your chaste, poor and obedient life will thus become a transparency of the loving face of Christ.⁶ You, virgin and chaste for the Kingdom of Heaven, more than anyone else are called to put on Christ, his sentiments of humility, meekness and patience. Your vow of chastity calls to mind the fruitfulness of a nuptial relationship between creatures and their Creator and a space in human hearts that God alone can fill. Called to take part joyfully in the poverty of Christ, who though he was rich yet for our sake became poor to make us rich through his poverty (cf. II Cor 8: 9; Mt 8: 20), witness with your detachment and the aspiration of your whole being to heaven, "where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Mt 6: 20). May you always be obedient in Christ. May your Communities be responsible ones in which the tasks of some are not a cause for others to shirk their commitments; Communities in which all exercise their discernment, the charity that builds them and fraternal correction. Show the world that renunciation of your own will and plans in freedom, love and fidelity to the Gospel is a source of happiness and opens life to complete self-fulfilment.⁷ When one feels deeply loved, one cannot participate in the mystery of Love, who gives himself, by holding back and watching from afar. You must allow the flames that burn the sacrifice to catch fire in you. And to become love. Openness of heart and mind, even before openness of hand, has always put you consecrated men and women in the front line in the task of responding to the different kinds of poverty that are a feature of contemporary life. You must also be ready today to respond to the challenges that confront all people of good will, individual believers, men and women, the Church and society. Down the centuries, love for your brothers and sisters, especially the most defenceless, young people and children, for those who have lost the meaning of life and feel rejected by everyone, has impelled consecrated persons to give themselves without reserve. Continue to spend yourselves for the world, always conscious that the one measure of love is boundless love. Communicate this special love for the smallest to all those you meet, especially the lay people who are asking to share in your charism and your mission. Always be ready to listen to the new calls of the Spirit, in the effort to identify, together with the Pastors of the particular Churches in which you are called to live, the spiritual and missionary emergencies of the present moment. As I urge you to keep your gaze fixed on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (cf. Heb 12: 2), I impart a special, affectionate Apostolic Blessing to you and to all consecrated persons across the world. *From the Vatican, 26 November 2004*