



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE ROGATIONIST FAMILY

Thursday, 6 December 2001

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. I joyfully welcome you and extend a warm welcome to each of you. Thank you for your visit; it takes place as a way to observe an important date: the 150th anniversary of the birth of your Founder Bl. Annibale Maria Di Francia. I greet your Superior General, Fr Georg Nalin, and thank him for the kind words he addressed to me in the name of everyone.

By welcoming you, who represent the Rogationists, the Daughters of Divine Zeal, the Rogationist Missionaries, the graduates and Lay Vocation Promoters who share the same charism, I wish to greet your colleagues and all who form a network of apostolic life in your religious families. On every continent they give themselves humbly, generously and joyfully for the spreading of "Rogate" (Ask the Master) born from the Heart of Christ.

During the Jubilee Year, your zealous religious Families had the opportunity to revisit their shared origins in an ideal way to draw from them inspiration and encouragement. At the same time, they did not fail to look to the future, with a renewed commitment to know the Rogationist charism better and to disseminate it enthusiastically on every continent.

2. Together with you, I want to give thanks to God for the good done by your Congregations in these 150 years of history. I thank Him because the *reassuring stream of charity and zeal* which had its beginning in 1878 continues to flow. Fr Annibale's providential meeting with an almost blind beggar was *the spark* that set him on fire with evangelical love. He came into contact with the "Avignone" slums of Messina (Italy), where the poorest of the poor lived, the real "rejects" of society.

"From that time" - he writes in his memoirs - "I found myself involved, according to my limited energies, in the spiritual and temporal promotion of that abandoned people" (Annibale Maria Di Francia, *Preziose Adesioni*, Messina 1901, p. 3). From that time the *flame of charity* burned brightly in his life. He chose to consecrate himself totally to the poor and humble, seeing and serving Christ in them. That humble little seed has grown in a marvellous way during the last 150 years. It has become a majestic tree, that already spreads its branches to every part of the world, through the ardent zeal of the sons and daughters of Fr Annibale. While I congratulate you on the journey accomplished, I encourage you to live even more faithfully your calling and more generously, your apostolic efforts.

The observance of this important event for your Institutes cannot be limited to a simple recalling of the past, however wonderful, but it must become an impulse to look to the future, to respond with the original fervour of the beginning to ancient longings and new challenges of humanity.

3. What needs to be done to ensure that the vigorous tree, planted by your Blessed Founder, continues to bear fruit in abundance?

Dear Brothers and Sisters, the answer to the question that you pondered over in the Jubilee Year, is age-old and yet ever new: *it is holiness*, the fertile soil in which your religious Family has grown, a soil that can still promise a hopeful and fruitful future in the new millennium.

Yes, holiness is possible even in these troubled times. Rather, *it is the priority* that I pointed out in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* at the end of the Great Jubilee as the way for thinking about the whole pastoral life of the Church (cf. n. 30).

Thus, *today* more than ever, consecrated life has to play a crucial role: it must be holy, if it does not want to lose its basic authenticity; it must be lived entirely in accord with the strict requirements of prayer, humility, poverty, the spirit of sacrifice and the faithful observance of the vows.

The teaching of your Blessed Founder is a solid foundation for you. Fr Annibale Maria Di Francia knew "that the vocation to the religious state is the same as the vocation to holiness" (*L'Anima del Padre*, p. 38).

How relevant are his words! They can inspire you to ensure the primacy of the interior life in the midst of your many educational, assistance, charitable, missionary and editorial activities.

4. Do not be afraid that the time given to prayer can somehow be a brake on the apostolic dynamism and praiseworthy service to your brethren, that make up your daily labour.

Precisely the contrary is true. To love and put prayer at the centre of every plan of life and apostolate is the true school of the saints. Distinguish yourselves in the art of prayer: this "is the secret of a truly vital Christianity, which has no reason to fear the future, because it returns

continually to the sources and finds in them new life" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 32).

May the Blessed Virgin Mary be your example and support. Remain in Mary's school, preserving in all its primitive freshness the distinctive Marian direction impressed on your congregation by your Founder as an unmistakable characteristic of the families he founded.

As long as you contemplate Her, the highest masterpiece of God, the model and ideal of every consecrated life and the support of all apostolic activity, the fountain of your generosity and dedication, of your interiority and fervour, of your holiness and grace that makes you *valuable workers in the harvest of the Lord*, will not dry up.

Finally, be *deeply Eucharistic souls*, who know how to adore, love, enjoy the Eucharist. Blessed Di Francia at the dawn of your Congregations gave the central place to the Eucharistic Mystery. From Eucharistic adoration you will obtain not only the gift of new vocations, but also the grace of increasing the enthusiasm and joy of your priesthood, of your consecration and of your Christian activism.

5. Dear Brothers and Sisters, this is what the Church expects of you! Do not disappoint her, but confirm her hopes with your generous dedication. The *convinced witness* is the secret for attracting fervent and generous young people to your ideal.

May the Lord bless you for all that you have thus far accomplished and fill you with his grace, so that in the present and for the future you continue to work with self-denial and joy for the Kingdom of God. My prayer, that I offer to the Lord relying on the intercession of Blessed Annibale Maria Di Francia, goes with you. May the Lord give a great increase of vocations to your Institutes and to the whole Church.

With these wishes, I impart my Blessing to all present and I gladly extend it to your whole spiritual Family.