



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MISSIONARIES OF ST. CHARLES
(SCALABRINIANS)**

Friday, 9 February 2001

Dear Scalabrinian Capitular Fathers!

1. I am pleased with this meeting which enables me to greet you all personally on the occasion of your General Chapter. You requested this audience in order to reconfirm your devotion to Peter's Successor, according to the fidelity that characterized your founder. My cordial welcome to you all!

A little more than two years have passed since we met at Castel Gandolfo in September 1998. The premature death of your Superior General, Fr Luigi Favero, who guided your congregation with enthusiasm, has brought you back to Rome to elect a new Superior General. Your votes went to Fr Isaia Birollo, to whom I offer my congratulations and best wishes for the difficult task entrusted to him. At the same time I hope that this meeting in Rome has permitted you to reflect more deeply on your missionary project.

2. You have held your General Chapter while the memory of the Great Jubilee, which brought us into the third millennium of the Christian era, is still vivid. This moment of reconciliation and grace was lived "*not only as a remembrance of the past, but also as a prophecy of the future*" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 3). On the Church's pilgrimage, migrants are an eloquent image of the journey of the entire People of God to the Father, who wishes to reveal his face to those who seek it. Their experience becomes a symbol on which it is worth reflecting.

Modern migrations highlight the consequences of vast, complex social phenomena, which affect all societies to varying degrees. The imbalances created by economic and social processes that have a particular impact on the very weak force millions of men and women to seek the possibilities of survival elsewhere. Ethnic conflicts, natural disasters and political oppression oblige

entire populations to ask for asylum and protection from other nations. Fear of the foreigner, however, prompts affluent societies to put restrictions on the entrance of migrants, making their acceptance and integration more difficult. But the barriers cannot stifle the hope of those who have the right to a better future.

The presence of migrants, in fact, has transformed many countries into multiethnic and multicultural societies. Such diversity is often perceived as a threat to the cultural and religious identity of the host countries. Hence the pressure for xenophobic restrictions, which in themselves carry the risk of tension and misunderstanding that are damaging for social peace. Before the risk of ethnic clashes, all are invited to reconsider social coexistence in terms of dialogue and fellowship.

Real integration requires the building of a society that can acknowledge differences without absolutizing them and foster a generation of citizens formed in the culture of dialogue. "In the climate of increased cultural and religious pluralism which is expected to mark the society of the new millennium, it is obvious that this dialogue will be especially important in establishing a sure basis for peace" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 55).

3. In view of these issues, dear Scalabrinian Fathers, we see all the timeliness of your mission. You are called to deepen your charism in order to spread it as the Church's gift to the world of human mobility. The ever broader horizons of migration require of you the courage to open yourselves to new frontiers, to which your mission calls you. The Lord of the harvest will not permit his weakest and most scattered children to remain without those who will break bread for them and gather them in unity.

In reflecting on your missionary project, you have also become more aware that fraternal life in community characterizes your specific life and mission. Through this witness, too, you can be a sign, prophecy and witness of the Resurrection wherever the marks of division and injustice are strongest. By gathering the migrants of different nations together, you will enable the various local Churches to sing in different languages, as at Pentecost, the praises of God for the marvels that he works in history.

As you behold the suffering face of migrants, consider it your duty to defend and promote their rights with the heartfelt sharing that the Spirit inspires in those whom he has called to the service of the kingdom. The growing number of non-Christian migrants cannot leave Ecclesial Communities indifferent, for they are called to proclaim and bear witness to the saving love of the Father. "Proclaiming and bearing witness to the Gospel of charity constitutes the connecting tissue of the mission towards migrants" (*Message for World Day of Migration*, 2001).

4. Your specific charism spurs you to proclaim and bear witness to the Good News of the kingdom among migrants whose situation is most critical. In searching for a better future they often

experience exclusion, marginalization and setback. It is up to you to sustain their hope, in such a way that through your solidarity and that of many other Christians they may experience the provident action of God, who guides history towards a more human future. Faith lived in the midst of daily difficulties thus becomes a proclamation of the mission of Christ, who came to gather the dispersed children of God (Jn 11: 52).

Migrants question and challenge you to live the values of openness, hospitality and communion in diversity, following the example of your founder, Bl. John Baptist Scalabrini, who knew how to view the reality of migration in a providential and prophetic light. Together with him, may you look at migration with God's eyes and listen to his word with a migrant's heart.

I ask the Virgin Mary, Mother of migrants, to accompany your intentions to carry out your missionary project, so that you may be, together with other equally sensitive and wise disciples of Christ, "morning watchmen at the dawn of the new millennium" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 9). With this wish, I impart my affectionate Blessing to you all.