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Vatican

Pilgrimage of the Schoenstatt Family to Rome
Prayer Vigil in the Vatican Gardens, September 7, 2004

Address

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This is the first spiritual highpoint of your pilgrimage to Rome: the moving and impressive Marian celebration in the Vatican Gardens. You have come here to the house of Peter, from different continents, from many countries where the Schoenstatt movement is established and active. At this very moment, through you, through your prayer and your testimony, the entire movement with all its rich and abounding diversity of life is represented here before this grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes. Bring to the Blessed Mother your apostolic zeal, which incites you to serve the Church in your countries in magnanimous ways. Bring to her your joys but also your sufferings and trials, which are never missing in our lives. Bring to her your plans and your apostolic initiatives filled with enthusiasm, but also the daily drudgeries of the grey everyday life that everyone has to bear. Most of all bring to this grotto of Mary your love of the Church and of the successor of Peter. Your founder Father Kentenich taught you this love of the Church: his *Dilexit Ecclesiam*, his love of the Church, was radical and unconditional, that is without ifs and buts. This is the great legacy that he left you and that you, as movement, endeavor to preserve and to live each day anew.

Dilexit Ecclesiam, that is certainly not a love which is easy; frequently it requires sacrifices and much of courage in a secularized world that tries to eliminate God and faith from people's lives. But only such a love is the surest key to open the way into the most profound mystery of the Church.

Whoever does not love the Church remains on the surface and will never comprehend that which is most essential, beautiful and fascinating in the Church. Because of this love of her children, the Church can become a visible sign of the presence of the living Christ in the history of humankind and an efficacious instrument in the work of salvation. This is indeed the vital task of your movement: to bring this love to Christian communities and to the world; to be trustworthy witnesses of this love. At the beginning of the new millennium the Church urgently needs such a testimony.

2. A reading of the Acts of the Apostles takes us spiritually into the cenacle where the apostles are in prayer united with Mary, awaiting the descent of the Holy Spirit. The Church at the beginning of the third millennium is facing the tremendous challenge of a new evangelization and is therefore in need of a new Pentecost. Our prayer this evening is nothing but a fervent cry, together with Mary: "Come Holy Spirit, descend upon us! Descend upon the Church of our time!" The Holy Father does not tire to encourage us ever anew when he says: "Numerous times during these years I have repeated my call for a new evangelization. Now I confirm it again, most of all to point out that it is absolutely necessary to re-ignite in our hearts the fervor of the original spirit so that we can be permeated by the ardor of the apostolic proclamation which followed Pentecost. We must identify with the glowing passion of St. Paul who called out: 'Woe to me when I do not proclaim the gospel!' (1 Cor 9,16)" (Novo millennio ineunte, 40)

In this connection our thoughts spontaneously go back to that unforgettable encounter of the Pope with the ecclesiastical movements in St. Peter's square on the eve of Pentecost 1998. At that time John Paul II wished to confirm the total confidence of the Church in those new charisms that the Holy Spirit so abundantly generates in our times. For the Pope, the spiritual movements within the Church are "a gift of the Spirit for the Church and a sign of hope for humankind." A sign of a "Christian springtime" that is approaching. ... Who among us does not remember the Pope's message during that memorable meeting when he called out to us: "Open your hearts with docility for the gifts of the Spirit! In gratitude and obedience, receive the charisms which the Spirit dispenses at all times. Do

not forget that each charism is conferred for the benefit of the whole, that is, for the well-being of the entire Church.” (May 30, 1998)

During this pilgrimage to Rome, being mindful of the words of John Paul II, your movement fervently implores the gift of loyalty to its proper charism. The charism is the most precious gift that a movement has received from the Holy Spirit. It is a gift as well as a task. It is a challenge. We must be grateful for it, but also use it responsibly, for we carry it – as St. Paul tells us – in fragile vessels (cf. 2 Cor 4,7). We must be attentive and vigilant. And the loyalty to one’s own charism has to keep equal pace with the missionary spirit. The charism is a treasure that must be shared with others. You must have the courage to carry your charism “to the ends of the earth”. ... Only when a movement shares its own charism will it preserve its full vitality and original beauty. Let us therefore look at Mary, whose life, since the moment of her immaculate conception, was always a total unconditional “yes” to the gift of grace.

3. One last thought: Today we are gathered in front of the Lourdes Grotto, on the eve of the feast of Mary’s birth: a feast which is very dear to each one’s heart. With the entire Church we thank the most Holy Trinity for his wonderful gift of Mary to the Church and for all of humankind. On the feast of her birth let us be filled with profound joy, and above all with that tremendous admiration that emanates from faith while contemplating her greatness and beauty: Mary – Mother of God, Immaculata, full of Grace, first disciple of Christ, woman who preceded us in faith, living icon of the Church, mother and heart of the Church, mother and teacher who encourages us ever anew with the words she spoke at that time at the wedding feast in Cana: “Do whatever he tells you.” (John 2,5)

How often have you already pondered these words! Your movement distinguishes itself by this strongly Marian trait. And precisely in this is found the most profound secret of the extraordinary spiritual dynamism of your charism. Mary is always “*Odrigitia*”, the one who shows the way, which is Christ. How many people have met Christ directly through your genuinely Marian spirituality, and how many have experienced a transformation of their entire existence through such an encounter? How many people have discovered the Church anew as a living, sheltering, motherly community? How many people have discovered anew the

greatness and beauty of their baptismal vocation? How many have discovered the inestimable value of family, of motherhood and fatherhood? How many have also received the courage of Christian radicalism in the decision for a life according to the evangelical counsels? Today you give thanks to the Holy Spirit and Mary for all these spiritual gifts which your charism has brought forth.

A special sign of your love of Mary are the many shrines of the Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt throughout the world. And your movement has reason to rejoice that these shrines are also erected in Rome, in the city of St. Peter, “in the shadow of the cupola of St. Peter”, just like Father Kentenich had foreseen it in a prophetic way.

Tomorrow we celebrate the solemn dedication of the new shrine in Belmonte, which will be the focal point of the future international center of the Schoenstatt movement in Rome. That will be an important milestone in the life of your movement, a sign of your profound unity with the successor of Peter. As pastor of the universal Church, he definitely needs all ecclesiastical movements, and he truly counts on you. May this new shrine here in Rome, in the heart of the Catholic Church, become another important center that radiates the charism of your movement. It should be something like a powerful antenna for your “*sentire cum ecclesia*”.

As President of the Council of the Laity, I am with you today to communicate to you the words of the Holy Father to the movements in 1998: “The Church needs you and counts on you!”