



To the Reverend Father
FRANCO MOSCONE, C.R.S.
Prepósito Superior General
of the Order of the Clerics Regular of Somasca

I was very pleased to learn that your Order is about to celebrate with a jubilee year an anniversary that is joyful and important for its history and charism. Next September 27th, in fact, will be the 500th anniversary of the prodigious liberation of your founder St. Jerome Emiliani, universal patron of orphans and abandoned youth, at the hand of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was a prodigious event which, at the same time, changed the course of a human life and started an experience of consecrated life that is highly meaningful for the history of the Church.

The life of the lay man Jerome Miani, a Venetian, was in some way "re-founded" on September 27th, 1511. That night, having made a sincere vow of amending his ways to the Madonna Grande of Treviso, through the intercession of the Mother of God he found

himself free from the fetters of imprisonment, which he himself later surrendered at the altar of the Virgin.

"Dirupisti vincula mea" ("you have broken my chains," Ps 116:16). This verse of the Psalm expresses the authentic inner revolution that followed that liberation, in connection with the troubled political circumstances of that time. It meant, in fact, an integral renewal of the personality of Jerome. By divine intervention he was liberated from the snares of egoism and pride, from seeking personal affirmation. His existence, formerly directed in a prevalent way to the matters of this world, was oriented solely towards God, whom he loved and served in a particular way in the orphaned, sickly and abandoned youth.

Guided by his family circumstances, which made him a tutor of all his orphaned nephews and nieces, St. Jerome reached the conviction that youth, especially those who experience some form of uneasiness, cannot be abandoned. They need an essential requirement for their growth: love. His love was superior to his

intelligence; and as it flowed from the very charity of God, it was full of patience and understanding: caring, tender and ready to sacrifice, like the one of a mother.

The Church of the XVI century, rent apart by the Protestant schism, and seeking a serious reformation within herself, was gladdened by a new springtime of holiness, which was the first and most original answer to the requests of reformation. The testimony of the Saints tells us that we must trust in God alone. Trials both personal and institutional, in fact, are meant to increase our faith. God has his own plans, even when we do not manage to understand his arrangements.

The care for youth and their human and Christian education, which marks the charism of Somascans, continues to be a commitment of the Church in every time and place. The growth of new generations must be nurtured not only with cultural and technical notions, but above all with love. Love defeats all individualism and egoism, and helps us realise the needs of each brother and sister, even and above all when they cannot

repay us for our care. The luminous example of St. Jerome Emiliani, whom Blessed John Paul II called “a lay man, animator of lay men,” helps us to take to heart every kind of poverty experienced by our youth: moral, physical, existential poverty; and above all the poverty of love, the root of every serious human problem.

The Blessed Virgin Mary will continue to guide us with her support, she who is an insuperable model of faith and charity. As she broke the bond of the chains that kept St. Jerome a prisoner, with her maternal tenderness may she continue to free men from the snares of sin and the imprisonment of a life shorn of love for God and one's brothers, offering the keys that open the heart of God to us and our heart to God.

With these sentiments I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, Reverend Father, to all the members of the Somascan Family, and to all those who will take part with faith to the jubilee celebrations.

From Castel Gandolfo, July 20th, 2011

Benedictus PP XVI