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BRASIL - GUARATINGUETÁ - 12.05.2007

Fazenda da Esperança

Greeting

Official translation

Be praised, my Lord, for all your creatures! - With these words, addressed to the Almighty and Good Lord, the Poor Saint of Assisi acknowledged the unique bounty of God the Creator, and the tenderness, strength and beauty that gently flows out upon all his creatures, making them mirrors of the Creator's omnipotence.

Dear Sisters, spiritual daughters of Saint Clare, our gathering here in this "Fazenda da Esperança" is meant to be a sign of the affection of the Successor of Peter towards the cloistered Sisters, and also a serene manifestation of love, echoing through the hills and valleys of the Mantiqueira mountain-range and spreading throughout the whole land: "No speech, no word, no voice is heard; yet their span extends through all the earth, their words to the utmost bounds of the world" (*Ps 18:4-5*). From this place, the daughters of Saint Clare proclaim: "*Be praised, my Lord, for all your creatures!*"

In places where society no longer sees any future or hope, Christians are called to proclaim the power of the Resurrection: it is here, in this "Fazenda da Esperança" – home to so many, especially young people, who are seeking to overcome drug addiction, alcoholism, and chemical dependency – that a clear witness is given to the Gospel of Christ amid a consumer society far removed from God. What a contrast from the prospect of the Creator beholding his work! In their contemplative lives, the Poor Clare Sisters and other cloistered religious gaze upon the greatness of God and also discover the beauty of his creation; hence they can picture him as the sacred author indicates, caught up in wonder at his handiwork, his beloved creation: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good!" (*Gen 1:31*).

When sin entered the world, and with sin, death, God's beloved creation, though wounded, was not totally deprived of beauty: on the contrary, a still greater love was received: "O happy fault, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!" – as the Church proclaims in the *Exsultet* during the mysterious and radiant night of Easter. It is the risen Christ who heals the wounds and saves the sons and daughters of God, saves humanity from death, from sin and from slavery to passions. The Passover of Christ unites heaven and earth. In this "Fazenda da Esperança", the prayers of the Poor Clare Sisters are united with the demanding work of medicine and therapy in order to vanquish the prisons and break the chains of drugs that bring so much suffering to God's beloved children.

In this way God's creation is restored to the beauty that so delights and amazes its Creator. He is the Almighty Father, it is he alone whose essence is love and whose glory is man fully alive, in the expression of Saint Irenaeus. He "so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (*Jn 3:16*), in order to raise up the one who had fallen along the roadside, attacked and wounded by thieves on the way from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the pathways of the world, Jesus is "the hand" that the Father stretches out to sinners; he is the way that leads to peace (cf. *Second Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation*). Truly we discover here that the beauty of creation and the love of God are inseparable. Francis and Clare of Assisi also discover this secret and they propose to their beloved sons and daughters one very simple thing: to live the Gospel. This is their norm of conduct and their rule of life. Clare expressed it very well when she said to her sisters: "Among yourselves, my daughters, let there be the same love with which Christ has loved you" (*Testament*).

In this same love, Brother Hans invited them to be the guarantors of all the work carried out in the "Fazenda da Esperança". Through the strength of silent prayer, through fasting and penance, the daughters of Saint Clare live out the commandment of love for God and neighbour in its supreme form, loving to the end.

This means that we must never lose hope! Hence the name given to this work by Brother Hans: "Fazenda da Esperança". We need to build up hope, weaving the fabric of a society that, by relaxing its grip on the threads of life, is losing the true sense of hope. This loss, according to Saint Paul, is the self-imposed curse of "heartless persons" (cf. *Rom 1:31*).

My dear Sisters, make it your task to proclaim that "hope does not disappoint" (*Rom 5:5*). May the sorrow of the Crucified Lord, which filled Mary's soul at the foot of the Cross, console the hearts of many mothers and fathers who weep with sorrow because of their children's continuing dependency on drugs. By your silent prayerful self-offering, an eloquent silence

that the Father hears, proclaim the message of love that conquers sorrow, drugs and death. Proclaim Jesus Christ, a human being like us, who suffers like ourselves, who took our sins upon himself in order to deliver us from them!

Soon we shall begin the Fifth General Conference of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean at the Shrine of Aparecida, so close to the “Fazenda da Esperança”. I trust in your prayers, that our peoples may have life in Jesus Christ and that we may all be his disciples and missionaries. I implore Mary, the Mother *Aparecida*, the Virgin of Nazareth who, in following Christ, kept all these things in her heart, to keep you in the fruitful silence of prayer.

To all enclosed Sisters, especially to the Poor Clares present in this institution, I impart my blessing with great affection.
