

POPE SAYS THIS IS "THE TIME OF THE LAITY"
Considers Their Contribution to Evangelization Indispensable

VATICAN CITY, FEB 17 (ZENIT).- "The time we are living in could be called the time of the laity," John Paul II said to the participants of the General Chapter of the Oblates of St. Joseph. The Oblates are dedicated to the neediest and the education of youth and were founded in 1878 by Blessed Giuseppe Marelli, a Piedmont Bishop.

According to the Holy Father, the laity are called at this time to offer an "indispensable" service in the evangelization of contemporary society to "give Christian inspiration to the temporal order." In "the Church's new spiritual stage," inaugurated by the Great Jubilee, John Paul II appealed to these religious to "speak to the heart of youth, proposing the Gospel to them with audacity."

"Make them love the Church. You may be sure that your word will be easier to accept if it is accompanied by the testimony of your example," the Pontiff exhorted.

Thus, collaboration will be established between religious and the laity who are "indispensable" for an adequate response to the present needs of evangelization. It is not just an "operational need," because of the decrease in religious vocations; it is a "new and hitherto unheard-of possibility that God is giving us."

"The time we are living in could be called the time of the laity," who today are "called to give Christian inspiration to the temporal order, actively and effectively transforming society according to the Gospel spirit," the Holy Father emphasized.

The Pope had special greetings for Fr. Lino Mela, the new Superior General of this Congregation, who was elected during the Chapter meeting that began in Rome on January 31. 45 religious participated in the Chapter meeting, representing the 500 priests and Brothers of this religious family, which is present in 12 countries around the world.