

Holy Mass on the occasion of the Closing Ceremony of General Assembly of the Apostolate
Military International, Celje, 12 September 2013

Dear Participants of this General Assembly,

Thank you for inviting me to celebrate the closure of the General Assembly of the Apostolate Military International, which took place in Celje in these past days. You have dedicated your time to a very important subject: *“The Christian Soldier in the service of Just Peace”*. I'm convinced that the time chosen for this Assembly was really a providential one. In fact, the whole world is engaged in discussions, meetings, international conferences, trying to find the just solution to the problem of the military conflict in Syria. Certainly you have discussed here the question of the Just Peace not only in terms of theological and spiritual approach but also analyzing different pragmatic proposals intending to solve this crisis and prevent further suffering and destruction in Syria. And what is important, you have accompanied your discussions with prayers and meditation. We can be proud to see that the Catholic Church is a leading force in this battle for peace. The interventions and appeals of the Pope Benedict XVI and of Pope Francis have been numerous and heartfelt, whether on the significant occasions of Easter Messages and addresses to the Diplomatic Corps, or at the Wednesday General Audiences and at the Angelus prayer. The extraordinary initiative of the Pope Francis to invite all Catholics and other religious denominations as well as all the people of good will to pray and do fasting for peace, on Saturday, September 7th, was a great success. Almost every day the Pope Francis is using every occasion to express his preoccupation for maintaining peace, with appeals to the World political leaders. We can evoke here one of them pronounced on Sunday September 1st, when the Holy Father vigorously reiterated *“I exhort the international community to make every effort to promote clear proposals for peace in that country without further delay, a peace based on dialogue and negotiation, for the good of entire Syrian people”*. On another occasion Pope Francis reminded the audience that *“It is not the logic of the conflict but the capacity for encounter and dialogue that can offer prospects of hope to resolve the crisis in Syria”* (GA August 25th). With satisfaction we notice that the messages of peace lunched by the Holy Father Francis are meeting a very large acceptance and motivate people to undertake the initiatives for peace and humanitarian help. But observing this particular activity of the Holy Father and following his teaching we have to keep in mind that the efficiency of his acting is not a result of pure diplomacy but is generated by his strong faith. In fact, in the Encyclical Letter *“Lumen Fidei”*, among other things the Pope states *“Faith reveals just how firm the bonds between people can be when God is present in their midst. Faith...also sheds light on every human relationship because it is born of love and reflects God's own love...Precisely because it is linked to love, the light of faith is concretely placed at the service of justice law and peace...Faith makes us appreciate the architecture of human relationships because it grasps their ultimate foundation and definitive destiny in God, in his love, and thus sheds light on the art of building, as such it becomes a service to the common good. Faith is truly a good for everyone, it is a common good”* (LF 51). The international community is still divided concerning the measures that should be applied to solve the Syrian crisis. But, for the moment, it is evident that the prayers and fasting strengthen those forces that are against the further international escalation of war in Syria. Suddenly there are reasonable proposals for solving the

problem not with the arms but with negotiations. The commitment of the Holy Father, his faith and love are uniting people of good will to work for peace.

Faith and love are the main motives that are uniting you in a common effort, as Christian soldiers, to serve the cause of Just Peace. In order to achieve this noble goal, you have chosen to develop the theme "To live authentically according to the Word of God and to spread the Gospel". Studying these questions with the help of the documents of the II Vatican Council has certainly allowed you to deepen your faith and open your heart to the needs of those who suffer and are victims of violence and wars. Soldiers are trained to be ready to use arms to defend the right cause. How to combine this with our Christian conscience? From the agenda of this Assembly I can see that you have dedicated a special attention to the teaching of the II Vatican Council, in particular the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. Let me just quote the following statement from that document (GS, 79): "Those too who devote themselves to the military service of their country should regard themselves as the agents of security and freedom of peoples. As long as they fulfill this role properly, they are making a genuine contribution to the establishment of peace". However, the application of this principle in confrontation with the teaching of the Gospel requires from us a very radical attitude. Let's take the Gospel of today's Holy Mass. "*Jesus said to his disciples: To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you*" (Lk 6,27). So, if the Christian military serviceman and women wish to fulfill their role properly, they have to undergo an internal transformation. To this commitment we are being invited constantly by our Holy Father Francis. Speaking about the meaning of Jesus saying that *He came to bring not peace but division* (Lk, 12,51), Pope Francis explains: "*It is not that Jesus wishes to split people up. On the contrary Jesus is our peace, he is our reconciliation! But this peace is not the peace of the tomb, it is not neutrality, this peace is not a compromise at all costs...it is not Jesus who creates division! He establishes the criterion: whether to live for ourselves or to live for God and the others, to be served or to serve, to obey one's own ego or to obey God*" (Angelus, August 18th). In this perspective, the Christian life of a soldier is really more difficult than of those who are not obliged to use arms in confronting evil. But only if we are able to love our enemies, do well to those who hate us, we will find peace in our hearts and be able to promote peace among the nations. In the first reading of this Holy Mass Saint Paul in his Letter to the Colossians writes: "*And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one Body*" (Col 3, 12-1). Peace of Christ means reconciliation with God, means love and readiness to serve "in one Body" it is in our Church, which is the Body of Christ.

I wish you to take with you from this gathering the gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ, who is constantly illuminating us with the light of faith and this way strengthening our love and hope and so making of us the servants of peace. May Our Lady, the Queen of Peace, accompany you in all your efforts! Amen.