



Fra Donatus Forkan
Priore Generale

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**TO THE WHOLE ORDER AND
THE ST JOHN OF GOD FAMILY**

*Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary,
Patron of the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God*

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Hospitality,

Today we are celebrating the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Patron of our Order. The patronage of Mary was officially instituted in 1736, but the great devotion and confidence that John of God had in our Lady, *ever-virgin*, reminds us that Mary always guided and accompanied John, protectively and lovingly, in his works of mercy. This means that from the very beginning he had certainly placed his mission under her protection.

Throughout our history, the Brothers of St John of God have always continued the tradition of entrusting the sick to her, particularly those without families of their own, orphans, the old and the abandoned, who have felt less alone knowing that Our Lady was looking after them.

We have now reached the end of the Liturgical Year and Advent will soon begin, heralding in the new Liturgical Year. Since next year will see the celebration of the Year of the St John of God Family, we wish to entrust the celebration of that event to the protection of Mary, Mother of the Church and Queen of Hospitality, even though the official opening will not be until March 2011.

We must look to Mary as a model, for in her life she had to face so many difficulties, perhaps the very same difficulties that many women in our own age have to cope with, with few resources or in the face of social prejudice. Scripture does not say much about Mary's own family life, or her relations with her parents, but the account of her visit to Elizabeth is emblematic: it shows us her sense of hospitality, care for and attention to someone passing through a moment of need.

These details revealed that Mary was a young woman like so many others, a working woman, who suffered and had a great sense of hospitality. So many women and so many men must look to her today, seeking the confidence and encouragement which they lack in particularly difficult moments in their lives.

We all remember the episode in the Gospel when Jesus stayed behind in the temple and was amazed that his parents were worried about him when they went back to look for him. How many parents today are worried about their children, who want to 'do their own thing' without taking any notice of their parents! Let us place our trust and confidence in Mary, and ask her to give us her patience and her ability to listen.

During this year dedicated to the St John of God Family, let us also entrust this our Family to her: if St John of God is our 'father' (even though we have only one Father), Mary will be our mother, and all of us must see ourselves as the sons and daughters of this great Family.

As I have said on other occasions, we are living through difficult times, in which not only is the Religious Life in crisis, but also the natural family which is unfortunately obliged to live with difficult situations such as unemployment and a lack of social and welfare services. Sometimes the difficulties seem to emerge with greater ferocity, but we must never feel abandoned that we must call on Mary for her protection and guidance, drawing our inspiration, hope and strength to move forward from her.

Even though we do not have the resources we need, and sometimes feel that we are not doing enough, or lose heart when facing daily difficulties, let us look to our Lady, to her boundless love and away she entrusted herself to our Lord in every moment of her life.

Through the intercession of our Founder, that is pray for Our Lady's protection of our St John of God Hospitaller Family.

With my brotherly greetings, I wish you a very happy Feast of Our Lady, Patron of the Order.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Donatus Forkan O.H.", written in dark ink.

Bro. Donatus Forkan, O.H.
Prior General