



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE ITALIAN TENNIS FEDERATION

Friday, 14 May 1986

Dear Friends, 1. I am pleased to meet you, the directors of the Italian Tennis Federation and the participants in the 43rd Italian International Tennis Championship. I gladly welcome you to the Vatican and I hope that your visit will serve as a moment of spiritual refreshment in the midst of the intense physical demands of the present Championship. I congratulate you on the excellence of your achievements in your sport, and I express the hope that you will always consider your ability as a gift to you from God himself. It is always a pleasure for me to meet groups of athletes from different countries and continents. Taking part in sport and the healthy competitiveness which accompanies it embody precious values which can do much to uplift the individual, and indeed can contribute much to building a society based on mutual respect and trust, and authentic peace. 2. On various occasions I have spoken publicly about sport as a real instrument of reconciliation in the world. Your presence here, from many countries, is an eloquent symbol of the power of sport to unite. It brings people together. Competition between athletes is a universal language which immediately goes beyond the frontiers of nation, race or political persuasion. All of this on condition that the men and women who engage in sport, especially on the international level, foster its inherent positive values, without allowing it to degenerate through excessive concern for merely material advantages or through undue subordination to partisan ideologies. Yours is a very competitive sport, and the high degree of physical fitness, self-control, discipline and sacrifice which it requires can make it a truly effective school of human and social maturity. As a group, you are among the most expert players of tennis. You are very frequently in the public eye. You therefore have a responsibility, especially to young people and children who look to you for example, to set high standards of sportsmanship and personal excellence. The ideals of fair play, honesty, friendship, collaboration and mutual respect which are so much a part of sport are very important building-blocks of the new civilisation of peace to which the youth of the world ardently aspire. I would very much like to encourage you along that path. 3. I expect you are aware that the New Testament uses the example of the athlete to illustrate a very profound aspect of human existence. Saint Paul writes: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may attain it". In a sense that is your every day experience in tennis! But Saint Paul is referring to the challenge of giving ultimate meaning to life itself. This is the challenge which stands before each individual and before humanity as a whole. Today, when there is so much loss of hope and so much confusion as to the purpose and meaning of life, cannot the values enshrined in sport open new horizons of humanism and solidarity to vast sectors of the world's young people? Is it not possible to think that leaders in various fields of sport will endeavour to give a living and convincing testimony of the beauty and worthiness of those values? Will you not put your talents and your

leadership at the service of peace, of human dignity, of genuine freedom? And in this way – to borrow another image from Saint Paul – you will give glory to God the Creator through your accomplishments, including your accomplishments on the sports field. Dear friends, be assured of my prayers for your personal and spiritual well-being. I would ask you to take my greetings to your families and friends. And may Almighty God bless you and protect you always. © Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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