



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ITALIAN UNION
FOR TRANSPORTING THE SICK TO LOURDES
AND INTERNATIONAL SHRINES (UNITALSI)**

Saturday, 15 November 2003

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am delighted to welcome all of you who come from various regions of Italy to commemorate the 100 years of life and activity of UNITALSI.

I first of all greet the national President, Dr Antonio Diella, and I am grateful to him for his cordial words on behalf of the entire Association. I greet Mons. Luigi Moretti, Vice Gerent of the Diocese of Rome and your Chaplain. I address a grateful thought to each one of you, and through you to all the members involved both in volunteer work and in the various activities promoted by your Sodality.

I would also like to recall at this moment all those who have preceded you in these 100 years, either in administration or in the humble and silent service that is a feature of the UNITALSI family.

2. Various celebrations in recent months have given you an opportunity to express your gratitude to the Lord: from the Rimini Congress to the international children's pilgrimage and the national pilgrimage to Lourdes; from climbing the hill of the Holy House in Loreto to all your other formative, cultural and religious initiatives.

You now want to conclude your jubilee with the visit to the Eternal City in order to renew in this way the expression of your fidelity to the Successor of the Apostle Peter. You know well that every baptized person is called to be God's "living shrine" by a life consistent with the Gospel message. On various occasions you have meditated on the universal vocation to "holiness". In this regard,

and also recently in the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, I stated that "the contribution of the lay faithful to the life of the Church is essential: they have an irreplaceable role in the proclamation and the service of the Gospel of hope" (n. 41).

3. Dear Brothers and Sisters, keep alive the charism of your ecclesial Association.

May the biblical icon of the Good Samaritan who stoops down to the one who is injured and in need (cf. Lk 10: 30-37), as well as the tenacity, fortified by faith and full of hope, of the people who carried the paralyzed man to Jesus by letting his bed down through the roof (cf. Lk 5: 18-20), be an incentive to you for ever fuller devotion to God and to your neighbour.

Nourish your personal life and your work in UNITALSI through listening to the Word and prayer, with an intense sacramental life and an endless quest for the divine will. This is the way in which you will carry out "the spiritual worship" pleasing to the Lord.

4. The origins of your Association are linked to the Marian Shrine of Lourdes. By imitating the one who, after welcoming in her womb the "Word made flesh", set out for the house of Elizabeth, make yourselves also available to carry out every sort of humble and simple service. Like her, be witnesses of God's love.

The Immaculate, who "*gives joy and peace*", will make "*God's holiness shine*" in your hearts (cf. *Missal of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, n. 36, *Preface and Collect*). Turn to her with the recitation of the Rosary and accept her invitation to make the most of suffering and pain as precious contributions to the world's salvation. Our Lady will not fail to give you her help and will support you in every situation.

I accompany you with prayer and very willingly impart a special Blessing to you, to all those to whom you offer your care and love, and to the entire UNITALSI family.