



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE FEDERATION OF ITALIAN CATHOLIC WEEKLIES**

Saturday, 25 November 2006

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I greet you with joy and gratitude for your kind visit. I offer my cordial greeting to all, and first to Bishop Giuseppe Betori, Secretary of the Italian Bishops' Conference, and Fr Giorgio Zucchelli, President of the Italian Federation of Catholic Weeklies, whom I thank for interpreting your common sentiments.

I extend my greeting to the editors of the more than 160 diocesan papers and to the many collaborators who contribute in various capacities to publishing the individual weeklies. I greet the Editor and journalists of *SIR* Agency as well as the Editor of the daily, *Avvenire*.

I am particularly grateful to you because, at the end of your Congress on the theme "*Catholics in politics: Scattered or free?*", you have wished to visit the Successor of the Apostle Peter. You thus renew the attestation of your faithfulness to the Church, to whose service you dedicate your human and professional energies every day. In this regard, I also feel duty bound to thank you for the work of sensitization to the initiatives of good of the Successor of Peter for the needs of the universal Church that you carry out among the faithful.

The Federation of Italian Catholic Weeklies, which includes, as your President has just said, the diocesan newspapers, is celebrating its 40th anniversary in these days.

Indeed, it was on 27 November 1966 that your predecessors decided to join forces and to pool the intellectual and creative potential of the various information services that were already carrying out a useful service in Italian Dioceses. The initiative was born from the desire to give greater visibility and effectiveness to the presence and pastoral action of the Church, whose commitment it intended to support, especially at the most demanding moments.

Leafing through your weeklies of the past four decades, one can retrace the life of the Church and society in Italy: in so many of the events that marked it the social and religious changes are remarkable. These events and changes were punctually recorded and commented upon in these pages and special attention was paid to the daily life of the parishes and diocesan communities.

In the face of a multifaceted action that endeavoured to tear up the Christian roots of Western civilization, the special role of instruments of social communication with a Catholic slant is to educate the mind and form public opinion in accordance with the Gospel spirit. Their task is to serve the truth courageously, helping public opinion to look at, interpret and live the situation with God's eyes.

The objective of the diocesan paper is to offer to all a message of truth and hope, emphasizing the events and situations in which the Gospel is lived, in which good and truth triumph and in which, with hard work and creativity, people weave and repair the human fabric of small community realities.

Dear friends, the rapid development of the means of social communication and the arrival of many and advanced technologies in the media sector have not rendered your role useless. Indeed, in some aspects, it has become even more significant and important, because it gives a voice to the local communities that are not properly represented in the major newspapers.

The pages of your publications, recounting and fostering the vitality and apostolic zeal of individual communities, constitute a precious vehicle of information and a means of Gospel penetration. Your far-reaching circulation witnesses to the importance of your presence - that was also fittingly recognized at the recent Convention of the Italian Church in Verona. You are even able to reach where it is impossible for traditional pastoral means to have any effect.

Your weeklies, furthermore, are rightly described as the "people's papers", for they keep in touch with the events and life of local persons and pass on the popular traditions and rich cultural and religious patrimony of your towns and cities. In recounting daily events, you make known that quiet reality woven of faith and goodness that constitutes the genuine fabric of Italian society.

Continue, dear friends, to make your papers a network of connections that facilitates relations and encounters with individual citizens and institutions, as well as among associations, the various social groups, parishes and ecclesial movements.

Continue to be "papers of the people and among the people", training grounds for comparison and loyal discussion among different opinions so as to encourage authentic dialogue, indispensable for the growth of both civil and ecclesial communities.

You can also carry out this service in the social and political milieus.

If, in fact, as you reaffirmed at your Convention, the legitimate pluralism of political decisions has nothing to do with the cultural diaspora of Catholics, your weeklies can represent certain significant meeting "places" for attentive discernment destined for the lay faithful involved in the social and political arenas, to initiate dialogue and find shared convergences and objectives in serving the Gospel and the common good.

Dear friends, to bring your important task to completion, it is first necessary that you yourselves nurture a constant and profound relationship with Christ in prayer, in listening to his Word and in an intense sacramental life.

It is necessary at the same time that you continue to be active and responsible members of the Ecclesial Community in communion with your Pastors. As editors, editorial staff and administrators of Catholic weeklies, rest assured, you do not carry out merely "any kind of job"; rather, you are "cooperators" in the great evangelizing mission of the Church. May you never be discouraged by the difficulties that abound nor by the obstacles that can sometimes even seem insurmountable. Past experience shows that people need sources of information like your newspapers.

I entrust your Federation and the vast public readership of the diocesan weeklies to the Virgin Mary. May she help you in the daily service which you diligently carry out.

As I also invoke upon you the heavenly intercession of St Francis de Sales, patron of journalists, I warmly bless you all, together with your relatives and your diocesan communities.

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