



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE MEMBERS OF ITALIAN CATHOLIC ACTION

Saturday, 30 December 1978

Beloved Sisters and Brothers!

My heart swells with great, fatherly joy on receiving you today for the first time in the inspiring and moving atmosphere of Christmas.

You, members of Italian Catholic Action, asked to "see Peter" and you have come in extraordinarily large numbers, full of fervour and joy, to bring your testimony of faithfulness and love, and to listen to the word of the Vicar of Christ; and I thank you sincerely and address my affectionate greeting to each one of you personally. In particular, I thank your President for the noble words with which he has wished to interpret your sentiments.

1. I wish, in the first place, to express to you my congratulations on what you represent in the Italian Church. For over one hundred years, in fact, Catholic Action has been living and working in this beloved nation, in which its presence has proved to be an effective source of formation for so many faithful of every age and every category, from children to adults, from students to workers, from elementary teachers to graduates; a breeding ground of vocations for priestly and religious life; a school of concrete and direct apostolate in the various places of commitment and work. How many bishops and priests come from the ranks of Catholic Action! How many religious vocations have sprung from among the members of Catholic Action! And how many fathers and mothers have been, and still are, real educators and formers of the conscience of their children, thanks to the formation received at "Association" meetings, and thanks to the apostolate exercised with love and enthusiasm in their own parish and their own diocese!

I can and must, therefore, trust particularly in you.

You have understood what article 2 of your Statute says. According to this the aim of Italian Catholic Action is "the evangelization and sanctification of men, the Christian formation of their consciences in such a way that they will succeed in instilling the evangelical spirit into communities and the various environments". You know the directives given by the Italian Episcopal Conference in a letter of 2 February 1976, according to which Catholic Action operates in three directions: formation; actual pastoral service in ecclesial structures and in situations of life; and the practical recomposition of the synthesis between faith and life in every environment. Finally, you have still in mind the enlightening words of the great Pope Paul VI, of venerated memory, who said to participants in the national Assembly on 25 April 1977: "Catholic Action must rediscover the passion for the proclamation of the Gospel, the only salvation in a world that is otherwise desperate. Certainly, Catholic Action loves the world, but with a love that draws inspiration from the example of Christ. His way of serving the world and promoting the values of man is primarily that of evangelizing, in logical consistency with the conviction that in the Gospel is contained the most overwhelming power, capable of really making all things new."

I trust in you, because Catholic Action, owing to its inner nature, has special relations with the Pope and therefore with bishops and priests: this is its essential characteristic. Every "ecclesial" group is a way and a means of living Baptism and Confirmation more intensely; but Catholic Action must do so in a very special way, because it is conceived as a direct help for the Hierarchy, taking part in its apostolic concerns. So I, as the Vicar of Christ, shaking hands ideally with the six hundred and fifty thousand members, say to each of them: "Take heart! Be strong and generous! I rely on you! Do honour to Christ, to the Church and to the Pope!"

2. What can I say to you, at this exceptional meeting, that will accompany you and sustain you, in these difficult moments in which Providence has set our lives?

Much has already been said and much more will be said, about this second half of the twentieth century, so stormy and restless, analysing the various economic, social and political phenomena which distinguish it. But among its various characteristics the one that is turning out more and more to be fundamental, is "ideological pluralism".

This concept certainly deserves a thorough examination as regards its theoretical content and its practical implications. If we want this "pluralism", at the practical level, not to imply solely the radical contraposition of values, distressing cultural confusion, one-sided "laicism" in state structures, the crisis of institutions and also a dramatic restlessness of consciences, which we experience every day in both public and private relations, then that mature Christian conscience of the Church is necessary to which Pope Paul VI providently referred in the encyclical "[Ecclesiam Suam](#)".

It was just for this renewed awareness of the Church, that is, for a deeper, mature faith, sensitive to all the "signs of the times", that the Second Vatican Council prepared us.

Therefore, a great and important task falls upon Catholic Action in our times, in "this distressing, dramatic and magnificent land", as my predecessor Paul VI described it in his Testament.

a) In the first place have the cult of Truth.

In order to be able to use really one's time and one's capacities for the salvation and sanctification of souls, the first and principal mission of the Church, it is necessary to possess, above all, certainty and clarity about the Truths that must be believed and practised. If one is insecure, uncertain, confused, inconsistent, one cannot construct. Today, particularly, it is necessary to possess an enlightened and convinced faith, in order to be enlightening and convincing. The phenomenon of mass "culturalization", calls for a deep, clear and certain faith. For this reason I exhort you to follow faithfully the teaching of the Magisterium. In this connection, how could I fail to recall the words of my predecessor John Paul I in his first and only broadcast on 27 August last? He said:

"Overcoming the internal tensions, which may have been created here and there, rejecting the temptations to conform with the tastes and morals of the world, as well as the titillation of easy applause, united in the one bond of love which must inform the inner life of the Church as well as the external forms of her discipline, the faithful must be ready to bear witness to their own faith before the world: 'Parati semper ad defensionem omni poscenti vos rationem de ea, quae in vobis est, spe' (I Pet 3:15)".

Today, more than ever, great prudence and balance are necessary because, as St Paul already wrote to Timothy (2 Tim 4:3-4), we are tempted to follow sound doctrine no longer and to "wander into myths".

Do not let yourselves be intimidated, or distracted, or confused by partial or erroneous doctrines, which then leave you disappointed and empty all fervour from Christian life.

b) In the second place, be concerned about holiness.

Only he who has can give; and the Catholic Action militant is such precisely in order to give, to love, to enlighten, to save, to bring peace and joy. Catholic Action must aim resolutely at holiness.

Every commitment, even if it is of the social and charitable type, must never forget that what is essential in Christianity is the Redemption, that is, that Christ may be known, loved and followed.

Commitment in holiness implies, therefore, austerity of life, serious control of one's tastes and choices, constant commitment in prayer, an attitude of obedience and docility to the directives of the Church, both in the doctrinal, moral and pedagogical field as well as in the liturgical one.

What St Paul wrote to the Romans holds good also for us, men of the twentieth century: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2).

The world today needs examples, edification, concrete and visible sermons. This must be the concern of Catholic Action!

c) Finally, feel more and more the joy of friendship!

Today men are in particular need of a smile, kindness, friendship. The great technical and social achievements, the spread of prosperity and of the permissive and consumer mentality, have not brought happiness. Divisions in the political field, the danger and the reality of new wars, continual calamities, implacable diseases, unemployment, the danger of ecological pollution, hatred and violence and the many cases of despair, have unfortunately created a situation of continual tension and neurosis.

What must Catholic Action do? Bring the smile of friendship and goodness to everyone, everywhere.

Error and evil must always be condemned and opposed; but the man who falls or who errs must be understood and loved. Recriminations, bitter and polemical criticism, complaints, are of little use; we must love our time and help the man of our time.

Concern for love must spring continually from the heart of Catholic Action, which, before the cradle in Bethlehem, meditates on the immense mystery of God who became man just out of love for man.

St Paul, again, wrote in the letter to the Romans: "Love one another with brotherly affection, outdo one another in showing honour ... Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep ... Repay no one evil for evil." (Rom 12:9-17).

3. These are the instructions that I leave with you in memory of this first meeting, while I exhort you to invoke the help and protection of the Blessed Virgin, the Queen of Catholic Action:

— May she, who is the Virgin of Tenderness, always make you feel her love and her consolation.

— May she, who is the "Seat of Wisdom", enlighten you to be always faithful to the Truth, knowing that "all those who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12).

— May she, who is our hope be close to you in your parishes and dioceses, so that you may

always be consistent with the great commitment that springs from membership of Catholic Action.

And may the Apostolic Blessing which I willingly impart to you, to your Ecclesiastical Assistants, to your Leaders, and to all members of Catholic Action and their respective families, as a token of the most elect heavenly grace, accompany you, help you.

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