



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO ITALIAN AND ARGENTINE ATHLETES 25 May 1979 *Gentlemen and beloved Sons!* I am sincerely grateful to you for this courteous visit, which permits me to meet and greet the prestigious champions of two countries united by deep ties of faith, culture, and blood, their managers and technicians with their respective families, and these two teams of youths who, if they do not yet enjoy the fame of their now famous colleagues, certainly vie with them in passion for sport and generous enthusiasm. I address a hearty welcome to everyone. I listened with attention and interest to the introductory address of the President of the Italian Football Federation, who succeeded in interpreting the common sentiments with kind and appropriate words, and also opportunely recalled the solicitude with which the Church has always followed the exercise of the various athletic disciplines, stressing at the same time, with exquisite delicacy, the appreciation that I, too, have already had the opportunity to show for values connected with the practice of sport. I am happy to note the clarity and precision with which you, Mr President, have assimilated the teaching of the ecclesiastical Magisterium on this subject. It is an important teaching, because it reflects one of the firm points of the Christian concept of man. It is worth recalling, in this connection, that already in the first centuries Christian thinkers resolutely opposed certain ideologies, then in fashion, which were characterized by a clear devaluation of the physical, carried out in the name of a mistaken exaltation of the spirit. On the basis of biblical data, they forcefully affirmed, on the contrary, a unified view of the human being. "What is man"—asks a Christian author of the end of the second century or beginning of the third—"what is man but a rational animal composed of a soul and a body? So the soul, taken by itself, is not man? No, but it is man's soul. So the body is man? No, but it must be said that it is man's body. Therefore neither the soul nor the body, taken separately, is man: what is called with this name is what is born from their union" ("De resurrectione VIII" in Rouet de Journal, *Enchiridion Patristicum*, n. 147, p. 59). When, therefore, Emanuele Mounier, a Christian thinker of this century, says that man is "a body in the same way as he is spirit: entirely body and entirely spirit" (cf. *Il personalismo*, Rome 1971, p. 29), he is not saying anything new, but merely repositing the traditional thought of the Church. I have dwelt on these points of doctrine, because the evaluation that the Magisterium proposes of the disciplines of sports is based on these principles. It is a question of a highly positive evaluation, because of the contribution which these disciplines make to an integral human formation. Athletic activity, in fact, if carried out according to correct criteria, aims at developing strength, skill, resistance and balance in the organism, and at the same time encourages the

growth of interior energies themselves, becoming a school of loyalty, courage, endurance, resoluteness, and brotherhood. Addressing, therefore, a word of applause and encouragement to you, young athletes present here, and to your colleagues all over the world, to the managers, technicians and all those who dedicate themselves to the noble cause of spreading wholesome sporting activity, I express the hope that there will be an ever-increasing number of people who, strengthening their body and their spirit in the severe standards of the various sports, commit themselves to acquiring the human maturity necessary to cope with the ordeals of life, learning to face everyday difficulties courageously and to overcome them victoriously. Allow me now to say a word also in the language spoken in Argentina. Beloved Argentine Sons. I feel happy to be able to receive you today, the day, moreover, of the Argentine National holiday, to congratulate you warmly on your recent sports successes and to express to you my sincere esteem for your persons. You are young, however, and therefore full of hope and eager to improve both on the personal and professional plane. For this reason my words, when I speak to sportsmen like you, will always wish to be a kind of affectionate shaking up of spirits, encouraging them to develop boldly towards the aims that ennoble life most. Keep in mind the fact that while you play you are the centre of attention on the part of the masses. Skilful play, an excellent style, favourable results, will win you their applause and admiration. But God grant that they may be able to appreciate clearly in you a model of respect and loyalty, an example of comradeship and friendship, a testimony of real brotherhood. All this refines spirits and gives them a close perception of the sublime in the human being and of his true dignity. In this way you will also cooperate in the construction of a more peaceful world and, if you have faith, to the consolidation of the community of the sons of God: the Church. With these wishes I willingly impart to you the Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to the members of your families and to all beloved Argentine sons. © Copyright 1979 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana