



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL GAMES
FOR DISABLED PERSONS**

Friday, 3 April 1981

Dear brothers and sisters,

1. I AM HAPPY to have this opportunity to meet you, and I am pleased that the Second International Games for Disabled Persons, "Roma 81", has brought you together. The games for which you have come show clearly and effectively that handicapped persons can be and are fully integrated into social life. They show that you live a full life and share in its joys.

Sport for you is not a matter of economic interest. You have not come to set up new absolute records in the various branches of athletics. However, your participation in sport sets up a record that from many points of view is far more important: a record of surpassing yourselves, a record of universal brotherhood through sport and of practising solidarity with all members of the human family.

2. I therefore congratulate all who were involved in organizing the games. They include the International Stoke Mandeville Games and the International Sport Organization for the Disabled, the Italian National Olympic Committee, the Federazione Italiana Sport Handicappati, and the authorities of the Region of Lazio and of the Province and City of Rome. My congratulations also go to the organizers and participants in the scientific congress being held in conjunction with the games and dealing with medical, juridical and technical problems of the disabled. I congratulate you all for offering assistance to the disabled, for opening up for them possibilities of improving their lives, and for giving them hope.

3. I am glad to note that greater sensitivity is now being shown with regard to the needs of the handicapped. What gives rise to this sensitivity and sustains it is greater awareness of the value and dignity of the human person, which do not depend on secondary qualities such as strength and physical appearance but on the fundamental fact that he or she is a person, a human being.

4. With this goes awareness of the duty of solidarity with all members of the human family, who have a right to be integrated into the different forms of the life of society. Accordingly, we must endeavour to put an end to discrimination, not only by one race against another, but also by the strong and healthy against the weak and sick. In a document issued earlier this month the Holy See has stressed the basic principles concerning the disabled, who are full human subjects, with the corresponding rights, and must be helped, in accordance with the principles of integration, normalization and personalization, to take their place in society in all aspects and at all levels, as far as is compatible with their capabilities.

5. It is important that the greater awareness and sensitivity now existing should be embodied in appropriate legislation and that those who are active in the fields of medicine, psychology, sociology and education should foster the full integration of the handicapped person into society. But it is no less important that there should be a change of heart, a conversion, on the part of every citizen and every group in society, so that they may willingly and fraternally accept the presence of handicapped persons at school, at work and in every activity, including sport.

6. Handicapped persons play an important part in creating a new civilization, the civilization of love, by removing social barriers and bringing in new values, the values not of force but of humanity.

7. In Jesus Christ there is an important message for all the disabled, and for those who serve the disabled, and for society as a whole in its relations with them. Jesus Christ brought us a message that has emphasized the absolute value of life and of the human person, who comes from God and is called to live in communion with God. The same message can be read in his own life of love for the sick and suffering, and of service to them. The message also comes from the words with which he identified himself with all those in need and indicated that his disciples should be known for their loving service of the poor and the weak: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Matth.* 25, 40).

I pray that his message will be heard, and that fresh hope will be given to the disabled, and that new love will permeate all society.

