



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO MEMBERS OF THE
ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE**

Thursday, 21 May 1998

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you’. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’” (Jn 20: 21-23).

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. The principal theme of your plenary assembly is precisely the Holy Spirit, whom the risen Jesus gave to the Apostles at the beginning and who is still present and active in our Churches, constantly spurring them on in their mission.

This customary, familiar meeting gives me deep pleasure. As a sign of communion, it enables me to share more closely in your specific pastoral concerns. I greet and thank your President, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, together with the other Italian Cardinals. I greet the Vice-Presidents, the General Secretary and each of you, venerable and dear Brothers in the Episcopate, thanking the Lord together with you for the gifts he never tires of giving us. In his company the labours and the crosses of our apostolic service become easy and light to bear (cf. Mt 11:28-30).

2. This second year of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee is dedicated to the Holy Spirit because, as I had written in my Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*: “What was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit ‘in the fullness of time’ can only through the Spirit’s power now emerge from the memory of the Church” and “can be made present in the new phase of man’s history on earth” (n. 51). However, dear Brothers, this new phase is chiefly a time of mission for us, and in Italy’s present situation, the time for a new evangelization.

I rejoice with you because in recent years you have given more concrete form to this great task of the new evangelization, particularly through your Christian-oriented cultural project, which, in the first place, concerns the

evangelization of various cultures, to make Jesus Christ the decisive reference point for personal and social thought and behaviour.

With the breath of the Spirit, *new possibilities and forms of missionary activity* are also increasing in the Italian Dioceses, beginning with the one started here in Rome called the "City Mission". Their common intention is to awaken among the various ranks of God's People, with the full involvement of the laity, a more vivid and precise awareness of the missionary mandate that comes to us from God the Father through the risen Christ. We see the urgent need to find the most effective and feasible ways to fulfil this mandate for every individual person or family, in the areas of life and work, schools and universities, the communications media, hospitals and the many situations of poverty and marginalization. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, the Pope has great confidence in these new forms of mission and expects much from them.

3. In this same perspective of evangelization, we recall with gratitude to the Lord the extraordinary event of the *National Eucharistic Congress*, for which I was able to be in Bologna with most of you. Indeed, that congress was particularly effective in expressing the centrality and fruitfulness of the Eucharist in the life of the ecclesial community, as well as in every area of action and responsibility.

Another meeting I recall with pleasure is the *World Youth Day* celebrated in Paris last August: on that occasion many of you were also present, together with 100,000 young Italians filled with faith and enthusiasm. The International Eucharistic Congress and the World Youth Day which will take place in Rome during the Holy Year are meant to follow the spirit of the Paris and Bologna events, as important moments in the life of a Church which wishes to be ever more deeply united with her Lord and, in this way, increasingly able to penetrate the heart of contemporary humanity, to lead it or lead it back to Christ. The Great Jubilee, for which I know Italian Dioceses are actively preparing under your guidance, is really a favourable time and moment (cf. 2 Cor 6:2) for the commemoration of the Birth of our only Saviour, to become a principle of conversion and mission for us all.

4. The subject of your assembly's reflection, dear Brothers, is also *the pastoral care of human mobility*, in its twofold aspect of concern for those who knock at Italy's doors in search of more acceptable living conditions and of spiritual assistance to the many communities of Italians living and working abroad. These dimensions of pastoral care, both of which are indispensable, should be developed with a fully evangelical outlook. This requires attention, solidarity and ready service for individuals and families in their many needs and difficulties, especially employment, housing and health care. No less concern should be shown for the faith and spiritual life of Italians abroad and of the many immigrants in Italy who are Catholic, without neglecting to offer the saving message of the Gospel to all those whom God's Providence brings to this land.

Another topic you are discussing is the Italian Church's involvement *in radio and television broadcasting*. I am very pleased that you have had the courage and far-sightedness to take on an extensive project in this field which is so important for evangelization and the formation of mentalities and behaviour. I also hope and trust that through the friendly co-operation of the various Christian-inspired media, national and local, among which I would like to mention the excellent service offered by the daily newspaper *Avvenire*, as well as by the other Catholic newspapers, a Christian interpretation of life and events may be more and more concretely offered to everyone.

5. Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, on the happy occasion of our meeting I want to confirm and renew that *trust* and *expectation* which I have frequently expressed regarding *the Italian Church and nation*, which is particularly timely in view of the progress being made in building European unity. Now more than before, Italy is called to make her contribution so that the Christian faith may be a life-giving leaven and unifying bond in the new Europe that is being built. Obviously, to be able to fulfil this task, Italy must first keep alive and active in her own land that religious and cultural heritage which has been present since the witness and martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

In this phase of rapid change, in which efforts are being made, not without toil and disagreement, to redesign the country's institutional, social and economic structures in the European context, I deeply share your concern and insistence that *work*, a decisive factor in the advancement of the individual and of society, *be protected and increased*, and that new and effective remedies be found for the frequent situations where it is lacking. The Christian community, on the basis of a deeper understanding of the faith, ought with determination and renewed creativity be actively involved in identifying new forms of initiative, sharing and support. The special attention which is paid to the poor, to children and to youth must be updated by courageously identifying still unexplored ways of participating, so that a greater prospect of hope and trust may be offered along with employment.

May active charity not tire of seeking ways to alleviate the needs of each individual with the solidarity of all, after the example of the first Christian community (cf. Acts 2:42ff. and 4:34ff.). In this regard, I again extend my affectionate remembrance and prayer to the peoples of Campania, so harshly tried by the recent natural disaster.

It is clear however that in an increasingly open economy, the *principle of subsidiarity* is becoming more important. This principle allows all the energies and capacity for initiative of Italian society to be used to greater advantage.

6. Practically speaking, the *family* is the most valuable and important resource for the present and future of Italy. However, its fundamental structure and its rights and duties are also those most at risk and threatened. I am therefore at your side, dear Brothers, in the projects which you never tire of promoting in order to give the family apostolate an ever more pivotal role in the Church's activity and to reach the greatest number of families possible in their actual living conditions.

It is equally indispensable to *foster and spread a culture favourable to the family and to life*, to be consistently and courageously committed to developing social policies that are truly attentive to the family's role in Italian society and also to guarantee respect for the constitutional norm (art. 29) by which the Italian Republic "recognizes the rights of the family as a natural society based on marriage": indeed, there are too many bills, administrative measures and judicial decisions which actually oppose these fundamental rights. I therefore sincerely encourage all the cultural, social and political forces, and, in a special way, family organizations themselves, to face this difficult challenge which is decisive for the features that Italy is acquiring.

In its indispensable task of education, the family is aided by the school, to which our caring attention as Pastors is also directed. We are keenly interested and concerned, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, with all Italian schools, which, if their quality is to be seriously improved, need to be concretely recognised, to this end, as a priority for the entire nation. We are especially and seriously concerned about *independent schools*, including *Catholic schools*, whose effective parity,

which is a positive and firmly established reality in other European countries, is not yet recognised in Italy. Let us therefore forcefully and urgently ask that this unfortunate anomaly, which does no honour to Italy, be overcome at last.

Venerable Brother Bishops of Italy, in this month dedicated to the Virgin let us entrust the desires and concerns of our hearts to her, our Trust and our Hope.

May God bless each of you and the Churches which are entrusted to you. May he bless the Italian people, protect them from threats and dangers, enlighten their path toward the dawn of the third millennium and sustain the steps of their Gospel preachers who are working to revive their faith and strengthen their hope.

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