



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS, ADMINISTRATORS AND STAFF
OF THE BAMBINO GESÙ HOSPITAL**

Monday, 13 December 1999

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am pleased to extend my cordial welcome to each of you. I warmly thank you for this visit, which you have wished to pay me on the occasion of the 130th anniversary of Bambino Gesù Hospital. Your presence is evidence of the long-standing attention and support that the present Successor of the Apostle Peter has shown to this praiseworthy institution, as did his Venerable Predecessors, especially since 1924 when the noble Salviati family of Rome gave it to the Holy See.

I particularly greet the hospital's president, Prof. Adriano Bompiani, and thank him for his courteous words on your behalf. With him I greet the distinguished members of the Board of Directors. I also extend an affectionate thought to the doctors, staff and the Daughters of Charity, expressing my heartfelt esteem and appreciation for everyone's generous efforts in serving sick children.

2. The 130th anniversary of Bambino Gesù Hospital, celebrated on the threshold of the Year 2000 with important national and international scientific events, is an excellent occasion to stress the importance this institution has attained in the field of modern paediatrics. This event also shows the spirit of loving devotion to sick children which has always marked the long history of your health-care centre. Founded just before the end of the Papal States, thanks to the foresight of the Salviati family, it experienced difficult years in Rome at the end of the 19th century and the entire 20th century, while always remaining faithful to its mission. In this regard it steadily developed its scientific competence and socio-charitable dimension, through the continual and enlightened commitment of the medical and religious staff and the involvement of an increasing number of

good-hearted people and public and private agencies.

In considering your humble beginnings in the Regola district, it is surprising to see the subsequent developments which have enabled Bambino Gesù Hospital, after its relocation to the Janiculum, its donation to the Holy See and its new juridical and structural organization, has become one of the most prestigious European institutions in the field.

3. Concern for the world of children is growing in contemporary society, as is an informed awareness of the respect owed to their inalienable right to life, to a family, to health, to instruction and to religious and civil education, as well as the rigorous defence of their innocence. Despite this, children are often subjected to serious affronts and violence, especially in the poorest regions of the world and in countries affected by war and hunger. They are threatened by selfishness and the rush for material well-being which sometimes absorbs their parents, distracting them from their duty to bring up their children by being close to them and listening to the problems associated with their growth and integration into society.

The Church everywhere continues to proclaim the centrality of the child, who is especially loved by Jesus and regarded by him as the model for all who are called to receive the kingdom of God (cf. Mk 10: 14). This special care is shown by the frequent interventions of the Magisterium and the innumerable Catholic educational and health-care institutions throughout the world, especially where the life and future of children are most threatened.

This is the context in which Bambino Gesù Hospital carries out a valuable service for sick children through daily service at its three branches in Rome, Palidoro and Santa Marinella, as well as through humanitarian missions in certain Third World countries and in Eastern Europe, and through the important contribution made to scientific research by its famous clinics. Thus it is gaining more and more credit as a significant and concrete expression of the Church's love for children.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, as I thank the Lord for the commendable and praiseworthy work Bambino Gesù Hospital has accomplished since its beginning, I would also like to express my satisfaction with the generous, daily commitment of its health-care workers to sick children and their families. I encourage everyone to continue this very precious and necessary service with constant dedication.

I fervently hope that your skilled work will help you achieve ever more promising goals in the fields of paediatric medicine and surgery. I therefore pray that your generosity will constantly bear witness to the tenderness of the God of life and give hope to all who must face the mystery of innocent suffering.

I entrust these wishes to the One invoked by Christians as "Health of the Sick", whom the

Evangelist Luke presents as ready to help newborn life. With these sentiments, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to the Board of Directors, to the distinguished doctors, staff and friends of Bambino Gesù Hospital, and especially to its young patients and their families.

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