



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO UNIV 99 CONGRESS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Tuesday, 30 March 1999

Dear Friends,

1. I affectionately welcome you all. Deep bonds join me to the world of young people and I am pleased every time that I can meet them. The audience with the UNIV Congress has now become an annual event. Welcome, dear young people of different nationalities! Our meeting takes place during Holy Week and is illumined by the celebrations that will be held in the next few days, the last days of Lent. The liturgy fosters in us an expectation of the Resurrection and strengthens us in the knowledge that love overcomes evil. Yes, in Christ love has prevailed over hatred; mercy has triumphed over sin. The words: "The Father loves you!", which are the theme of the recent Message to young people, echo in our spirits. This clear certainty confers great breadth on the theme you have chosen for your Congress: "*Solidarity and Citizenship*".

2. I wish to start with the second of these two terms. In a book by Bl. Josemaría, which you know well, we find a whole chapter with this very title: "Citizenship". In it we read the following: "This is your duty as a Christian citizen: to contribute to making *the love and freedom of Christ* pre-eminent in every aspect of modern life - in culture, in the economy, in work and leisure, in family life and life in society" (*The Furrow*, n. 302). Bl. Josemaría speaks of the love and the freedom of Christ: this is freedom from sin, the struggle that, out of love for Christ and sustained by his grace, Christians fight in themselves against everything that separates them from God and distances them from their brothers and sisters who, like themselves, are equally children of God. Never forget this, for it is here that the decisive battle for society's future is being waged: "The first and most important task is accomplished within man's heart. The way in which he is involved in building his own future depends on the understanding he has of himself and of his own destiny" (*Centesimus annus*, n. 51).

3. Joined with the term "*citizenship*", we find that of "*solidarity*". How can I not invite you to reflect on the immense human potential of peace, harmony and brotherhood which a consistent Christian life, longing for personal encounter with Christ in prayer and in the commitment to fraternal charity,

can contribute to the transformation of the world? Examined more closely, Christian solidarity proves to be more than a virtue in itself, but a spiritual attitude in which different virtues converge, particularly justice and charity. Justice can reduce differences, eliminate discrimination, assure the conditions for the respect of personal dignity. Justice, however, requires a soul. And the soul of justice is charity, charity which becomes service of the whole man. Today, being Christian means to grow in the awareness of "being at the service of a redemption which reaches all the dimensions of human existence" (*Santità e mondo, Atti del Convegno teologico di studio sugli insegnamenti del Beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Rome 1994, p. 10). The first and fundamental contribution which each believer is called to offer the new evangelization is faithfully to incarnate the Gospel in his own life: to be saints. In fact, those who seek personal holiness without reserve effectively help to spread goodness in the world.

This is a concrete way, within everyone's reach, to be apostles of the Gospel and artisans of a new humanity. In this respect, you have a teacher who guides you on this path: he is Bl. Josemaría, whose message contains one of the most significant charismatic impulses offered by the Holy Spirit to this awareness of service which the Church and all the faithful are called to render for the sake of the whole person and of all people.

4. Dear young people, this is the last UNIV Congress before the Great Jubilee. Treasure this occasion and all the opportunities this meeting offers you. Respond generously to the Lord's call: the Christian vocation, as you know so well, goes beyond the personal intimacy of your soul; it expands the spirit to the boundless dimensions of love. The gift of self to God, the summit of a conversion process from selfishness to love, will make you sharers in Christ's saving mission. It is in this complete solidarity with Christ that the children of God can fully discover the root of human brotherhood.

May Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, help you resolutely to direct your life to God and to your brothers and sisters, and enable you to foster the one ideal truly worthy of a child of God: to serve your brethren, like Jesus and with Jesus, who said of himself: "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve" (Mt 20:28).

As I wish you and your loved ones a holy Easter, I assure you of a remembrance in my prayer and cordially bless you all.