



The Holy See

JUBILEE OF THE DISABLED

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 3 December 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. This Jubilee day for "Community with the Disabled", whose high point was the celebration of the Eucharist this morning in the Basilica of St Paul-Outside-the-Walls, is now coming to an end.

I greet all of you here, as well as those who have joined us by radio and television.

This afternoon's celebration shows that the *integration of disabled persons* has made progress, even though there is still a long way to go; indeed, there are some important and urgent needs on which it would be good to pause and reflect.

First of all, the right that every disabled man and woman has in any country of the world to a *dignified life*. It is not only a question of satisfying their specific needs, but even more of seeing their own desire for *acceptance* and *autonomy* recognized. *Integration must become an attitude and a culture*; at the same time, lawmakers and government leaders must give their consistent support to this cause.

2. Scientific research, for its part, is called to guarantee *every possible form of prevention*, while protecting life and health.

When a disability cannot be remedied, it is still possible to unleash *the potentials which the disability does not cancel*.

This potential should be supported and increased: for rehabilitation not only restores impaired functions, but puts others into action and prevents deterioration.

Among the rights to be guaranteed we must not forget the right to *study*, to *work*, to *a home*, to the *removal of barriers*, and not only architectural ones! For *parents*, moreover, it is important to know that society accepts responsibility for the so-called "*after us*", so that they can see their disabled sons or daughters entrusted to the concerned attention of a community prepared to care for them with respect and love.

3. The Church, as my venerable Predecessor Paul VI liked to say, is "a love that seeks out". How I would like you all to

feel welcomed and embraced in her love! First of all you, *dear families*: those who have children with disabilities and those who share their experience. I say again to you today that I am close to you. Thank you for the witness you bear by the fidelity, strength and patience of your love.

In addition to families in the strict sense, I would like to mention those *communities and associations* where people marked by the most varied difficulties find the right environment for developing their potential. What a precious gift of Providence are the "*family-homes*", for example, where people who were once left on their own find a warm and generous welcome! And how praiseworthy are the various *associations* where, in a spirit of generous caring, limitations are not an obstacle but an incentive to grow together. And what can we say of the *volunteers* who help their needy brothers and sisters? Dear friends, you are a people who bear witness to hope, who silently but effectively are helping to build a freer and more fraternal world.

4. May the Lord's word illumine this path of solidarity. A little while ago the *Gospel of the Beatitudes* was heard in this hall, and on this maxi-screen we could admire the face of the merciful Jesus. In the kingdom of God - Christ reminds us - we experience a happiness that goes "against the tide" and is not based on success or well-being, but finds its profound reason in the mystery of the Cross. God became man out of love; he wanted to share totally in our condition, choosing to be, in a certain sense, "disabled" in order to enrich us with his poverty (cf. Phil 2: 6-8; 2 Cor 8: 9).

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake", for great will be their reward in heaven! This is the paradox of Christian hope: *what seems humanly a ruin, is in the divine plan always a plan of salvation*. Let us depart encouraged by this Jubilee day, one entirely marked by the Gospel Beatitudes. Christ, our travelling companion, is our joy. In a few days' time, we will contemplate him in the mystery of his birth: from Bethlehem, where he chose to make himself one of us, he will renew his message of happiness. It is our task to bring it everywhere, so that it may be a source of serenity and peace for everyone. I pray for this, as I bless you from my heart.

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