



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO PILGRIMS FROM AROUND THE WORLD
AT THE LAST AUDIENCE OF THE JUBILEE YEAR***

Saturday, 30 December 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. With great joy I welcome you to this special audience, the last of the Year 2000. Together with you, I wish to thank the Lord for the many benefits he has bestowed on us during these past months.

Among the groups from Italy, I am delighted first of all to welcome and greet the faithful from the *Archdiocese of Monreale*, led by Archbishop Pio Vittorio Vigo. For you, dear friends, this is the last pilgrimage of a year that has seen many pilgrims from your diocesan community in the Roman basilicas, beginning on 27 December 1999. I am sure that the visit to the tombs of the Apostles and the various other Jubilee initiatives organized locally will not fail to promote the desired spiritual and apostolic renewal of your region's social fabric.

I also greet the numerous parish groups here, especially those from St Tammarus in Grumo Nevano, from St Michael the Archangel in Bottegone di Pistoia, from St Andrew in Cantalice and from Christ the King in Pisticci. I take this opportunity to wish every parish a tranquil and fruitful pastoral year.

2. I now address the numerous representatives of the *volunteer organizations* working in the Civil Defence sector, who have come to Rome for their Jubilee. I respectfully greet the authorities present, beginning with the Minister of the Interior, whom I thank for the cordial words he has just addressed to me. I also thank the two representatives of the volunteers, who expressed the sentiments of all. Thank you also, dear volunteers, for your gifts: the spade, an old and new work tool, and for the helmet from the firefighters, who are always present when there is a life to save.

You represent one of the most recent and mature expressions of a long tradition of solidarity which has its roots in the generosity and altruism of the Italian people. Believers and non-believers come together in your associations, motivated by a common desire to help anyone in need. The noble goals and intentions of your organizations have recently received just recognition in appropriate laws that have helped to form a national identity for Civil Defence volunteers, who are attentive to the essential needs of the individual and the common good.

Today your associations in Italy, whether national or local in character, total some 1,300,000 members, subdivided into more than 3,000 organizations. These organizations, which are playing an ever greater role as the natural guardians of the territory, in recent years have written stupendous pages of generous solidarity and represent a promising sign of hope on the contemporary scene.

How can we not recall, for example, the assistance to the flood victims of Versilia, the earthquake victims of Umbria and the Marches, the landslide victims of Sarno, Piedmont and the Valle d'Aosta? And how can we not look with admiration at the thousands of volunteers who took part in the humanitarian missions in Bosnia and Hercegovina, in Albania, in Kosovo or in the rescue operations for the Turkish communities struck by the recent earthquake, and the French people of the Dordogne region? On these occasions, collaboration between the volunteers and government agencies not only alleviated the consequences of grave tragedies, but also helped to fill people with greater zeal for solidarity.

Your presence today in Rome to celebrate the Jubilee clearly expresses your commitment to continue the noble deeds that distinguish the volunteer associations for Civil Defence. In your laudable work, dear friends, continue to bear witness to the primacy of being over having, which characterizes every religious vision of man and the world. In this way, you will help to lay the foundations for the civilization of love. Wherever dangers and snares threaten tranquillity and peace, and leave man humiliated and alone, be watchful sentinels and living icons of the Good Samaritan!

May the Virgin Mary, who, informed of her cousin Elisabeth's needs, went "with haste" to where there was need (cf. *Lk* 1: 39), be your model and support.

3. I now greet you, dear participants in the pilgrimage organized by the *National Federation of Midwife Colleges*. Your visit is certainly appropriate during the Christmas season, when we recall an extraordinary birth that changed the course of history. My thoughts turn to the directors of the various local colleges that form your federation, spread throughout Italy, to the workers who assist you in your profession and to your relatives who share your act of faith on the occasion of the Jubilee.

The 20th century has known amazing scientific and medical progress in preserving and improving

human life. It is a gift for which we must be grateful to God and to those who have applied themselves to studying the regulatory processes of human life. And yet we cannot deny the fact that recent decades have also seen a growing mentality opposed to life, especially when it is at greatest risk and unable to defend itself. In spite of this, the human conscience continually points to the sacred and inviolable value of life. We could say that in many cases it is being eclipsed, also as a consequence of the juridical support that the law has given to practices objectively opposed to life.

The Church, however, in the name of truth, continues to speak out in the face of decisions that are contrary to the will of God inscribed in the very nature of the human being.

Today's mentality is tempted to consider a child sometimes as a right and sometimes as a threat. But a child is always a gift of God and receives immediately from him the right to exist. Therefore, only God is the master of human life. Knowing this, the Church never tires of professing in the words of Israel's ancient sage: "You have dominion over life and death" (*Wis 16: 13*).

To you, dear midwives, who have chosen the profession of caring for life at its birth, belongs the demanding mission of being concerned to promote in every circumstance this fundamental good of the human being. May faith guide you, so that you can proclaim everywhere the Gospel of life.

May Mary, Mother of the Lord, whom we contemplate together with Joseph beside the cradle of God's Son, support your work in the service of life.

4. I cordially greet the French-speaking pilgrims, especially a group from the Apostolic Union of the Clergy, members of the St Francis Xavier Apostolic Community and the laity who work with them, a group from the Religious Studies Centre of Paris, and a group of faithful from the Dioceses of Tulle and Châlons. The Christmas season invites us joyfully to welcome Jesus of Nazareth, true God and perfect Man. May your Jubilee pilgrimage rekindle your faith and renew your desire to commit yourselves to following Christ, who, "in himself puts hostility at an end" (*Eph 2: 16*)! To all I impart a heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors to Rome in these closing days of the Great Jubilee. May the experience of passing through the Holy Door - which is Christ - confirm you in faith and holiness of life. May the Jubilee grace encourage Christians everywhere to make Jesus our Saviour better known and loved. He is our true hope! He is the world's true wealth! Upon you and your families I cordially invoke the joy and peace which the angels announced at Bethlehem. God be with you all!

I cordially greet all who have come here from German-speaking countries. My special welcome goes to the pilgrims from Germany and Switzerland. May your pilgrimage to Rome in the Holy Year bring you closer to Christ, the Door leading to everlasting life. May the light of Christmas

shine throughout the New Year and show you the way in the third millennium. I give my Apostolic Blessing to you and your loved ones.

I cordially greet those who are listening to me and the pilgrimage of the leaders of several Sant'Egidio Communities in Africa, particularly the groups from Mozambique, Cape Verde and Angola. In the midst of the Christmas holidays, I invite you to welcome the Child Jesus with peace and joy, in order to understand how much God loves us and how happy we will be if we respond to him with faith, hope and love. I wish everyone a happy New Year and give you my cordial Blessing.

I warmly greet the Dutch and Belgian pilgrims. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, so that we might all receive inner peace and bear witness to it among all people of good will. I cordially give you my Apostolic Blessing. Praised be Jesus Christ!

I greet all the Polish pilgrims here. The festive Christmas season, which in a sense concludes the Great Jubilee year, brings us closer in a special way to the mysteries that form the heart of the Jubilee experience. When we gather round the crib that represents the stable in Bethlehem, our consciences awaken to the truth that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (*Jn* 3: 16). Throughout the year we have referred to this truth, thanking God for the immense gift of his love. Aware that we were not always able to respond fully to his love, we have asked forgiveness for our unfaithfulness and, trusting in God's mercy, we have made resolutions for the new millennium.

Knowing that we cannot fulfil them by our own strength alone, we have asked the Son of God for the light and power of the Holy Spirit, so that we can grow in faith, hope and love, and become always better witnesses to the Redemption.

Today once again I want to thank God with you for this time of grace. My hope for you and your families is that the fruit of this year will remain in your hearts and enrich the new century and the new millennium. God bless you!

5. Today's audience is enhanced by other significant groups, especially those of the laity and young people. Among these I wish to mention the Italian National Committee of the Friends of St Roch, as well as the members of the prestigious Italian Academies gathered here and the young people belonging to the Don Orione Work, who have come to Rome to spend an "alternative New Year's" together, following a pattern that has already been tried for some years. Thank you, dear friends, for coming.

I hope that you will all begin the New Year in the light and peace of Christ the Saviour, as I cordially bless you.

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