



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE FAITH AND LIGHT MOVEMENT

To my Sons and Daughters of the Faith and Light Movement

1. In this Holy Week of the first year of the new millennium, you have come to the Grotto of Massabielle on the occasion of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the foundation of your movement, and I greet you with affection and the assurance of my prayers. Mary herself invites you to rekindle your desire to "come and drink at the source"; she leads you, as she once led Bernadette, to the encounter with her Son. In Lourdes, the love of Jesus and Mary for the weakest appears with unique power, inviting you to give thanks to God for the marvels the Lord has wrought in you. I encourage you to renew and strengthen your faith, and to live every day with a sense of mission.

2. Those of you who have handicaps are the very heart of the great family of *Faith and Light*. Your life is a gift from God and makes of you witnesses to the true life. If your handicap sometimes brings you difficult trials, you often live, in Claudel's expression, with "enlarged souls in chained bodies". Dear friends, you are a precious treasure of the Church, which is also your family, and you have a special place in the heart of Jesus.

3. For thirty years, with boldness, courage and perseverance, *Faith and Light* has not stopped reminding people of the eminent dignity of every human person. We can be grateful for the hope and confidence which so many individuals and families have found in the movement. To those who assist the handicapped I give heartfelt thanks for the irreplaceable work they do every day in the service of those who are often forgotten by our society, and I thank them especially for the happiness they bring. In this way they bear witness to the fact that the joy of living is a hidden fountain which flows from trust in God and in Mary, his Mother. I wish to extend a special greeting to Jean Vanier and Marie-Hélène Mathieu who for a long time have devoted themselves to improving the lives of handicapped people and advancing their cause.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, your presence in Lourdes is also a call to Christians and to civic

leaders to understand better that a handicap, even when it calls for care, is above all an invitation to overcome all forms of selfishness and to commit ourselves to a new brotherhood and a new solidarity. As I recalled, during their Jubilee in Rome, the handicapped call "into question understandings of life linked only to personal satisfaction, appearances, efficiency" (*Homily*, 3 December 2000, No. 5). They call on all the members of society to give moral and material support to parents of handicapped children. While there is an ever growing tendency to eliminate before birth a human being who may be handicapped, the activity of *Faith and Light* stands out as a prophetic sign in favour of life and in favour of the priority due to the weakest members of society.

5. In your great diversity, coming as you do from seventy-five countries, your experience is a truly ecumenical one. The presence together in Lourdes of different Christian confessions, Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant, testifies, on the basis of your common faith in the Risen Christ, that every individual is a gift from God, with inalienable dignity and rights. It shows too that, despite a handicap, it is possible to be live with happiness.

6. With affection I invoke upon you, upon those accompanying you and upon those who could not come, the strength of the Risen Lord; may he grant each one of you courage and joy to continue the mission of bearing witness to God's love in the world. Following the example of Bernadette, may you be ever more receptive to the Good News, which humanity so greatly needs, and may you make it bear ever greater fruit. Entrusting you to the maternal tenderness of Our Lady of Lourdes, I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 2 April 2001

IOANNES PAULUS II