



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE ITALIAN CATHOLIC GUIDES AND SCOUTS ASSOCIATION

Dear Scouts and Guides of AGESCI,¹ I still have a vivid memory of the visit that I had the joy to make to the participants in your national "Route", at Piani di Pezza in the Abruzzi in the summer of 1986. This year you have suggested a great new communitarian experience, the national Camp, that will take place simultaneously in four campsites, in the Provinces of Avellino, Cagliari, Perugia and Turin. This time, unfortunately, I am unable to accept your lovely invitation to be with you. I would like to assure you, however, that I remember you with affection and am close to you in prayer, so that each one of you, a young person or an adult, may live the days at "camp" to the full. About three months ago I received in audience a large group of the directors and leaders of your Association, and I assured them of the Church's confidence and trust in the content and method of AGESCI's proven educational proposal. Now, as I think of the thousands of you in the splendid settings where you will pitch your tents, I would like to return to one of the formative topics dear to you, that is, the importance you must give to continually deepening your faith through practical love of, and respect for, nature: today this is an urgent and obligatory task for everyone, but it has always been so for scouts, who are motivated not by some vague "ecological feeling", but by the sense of responsibility that derives from faith. The protection of creation, in fact, is a distinctive feature of Christian commitment in the world.² Where everything speaks of the Creator and his wisdom, from the majestic mountains to the enchanting, flower-strewn valleys, may you learn to contemplate God's beauty, and may your souls, as it were, "breathe", opening to praise, silence and contemplation of the divine mystery. The "rally" in which you are taking part, therefore, as well as being an adventure holiday, becomes in this way an encounter with God, with oneself and others; an encounter favoured by a serious review of life in the light of the Word of God and of the principles of your formation project. When Jesus took Peter, James and John with him to Mount Tabor, he certainly had the opportunity to admire with them the view of Galilee that one can enjoy from those heights. But this obviously was not his primary aim. He wanted to make his disciples share in his prayer and to show them his glorious face in order to prepare them to bear up under the harsh trial of the passion. Keeping things in proper proportion, is this not also the meaning of the "camps" that AGESCI offers its members? These are important moments in which, with the help of the natural environment, you will have a strong experience of God, of Jesus and of fraternal communion. All this prepares you for life, for founding your most demanding plans on faith and for overcoming crises with the light and strength that come from Above.³ Dear friends, the AGESCI scouts programme seeks to form the personality of children, young people and adults, in accordance with the Gospel model. It is a school of life where one learns a "style" which, if it is well assimilated, endures throughout life. This style can be summed up in the word "service". And if this applies for every young person who takes part in this scouting experience, regardless of his faith, it is especially true for you, who call yourselves and want to be real "Catholics". Your service must be even more generous and disinterested, after the

example set by Jesus who said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20: 35). Dear Scouts and Guides, I assure you of my spiritual presence, strengthened by prayer, so that Our Lady, the faithful Virgin, may protect and accompany you. With these thoughts and heartfelt sentiments, I bless you, your leaders and the entire AGESCI family. *From Castel Gandolfo, 28 July 2003* **JOHN PAUL II**

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