



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE LEADERSHIP, MEMBERS AND FRIENDS
OF THE COMMUNITY OF SANT'EGIDIO**

Saturday, 8 February 2003

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Dear Friends of the Community of Sant'Egidio,*

1. I am happy to meet with all of you, who have come to Rome from around the world for a few days of prayer and reflection, on the occasion of the international meeting of the bishops and priests, friends of the Community of Sant'Egidio. A cordial greeting to the representatives of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities who are present.

I thank Bishop Vincent Paglia for the kind words he used to greet me on behalf of all, and with him, I greet Professor Andrea Riccardi, who has followed and guided the Community of Sant'Egidio from the beginning.

Your convention celebrates the 35 years of your community, that in these years has spread to many countries, creating a network of solidarity in the civil and Christian community.

2. These days you have gathered to reflect on the theme, "*The Gospel of Peace*", a theme that is very important and deeply felt as we pass through the present time marked by tensions and the winds of war. It is therefore ever more urgent to proclaim the Gospel of peace to a humanity strongly tempted by hatred and violence.

It is necessary to multiply all the efforts for peace. We cannot be hindered by acts of terrorism or by the threats that are gathering on the horizon. We must not be resigned as if war were inevitable.

Dear friends, to the cause of peace you bring the contribution of your experience, an experience of true fraternity, that leads you to recognize in the other a brother to be loved unconditionally. This is the path that leads to peace, a path of dialogue, hope and sincere reconciliation.

3. In the [Message for the World Day of Peace](#) of 1 January, I wished to recall the fortieth anniversary of the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, of my Venerable Predecessor, Blessed John XXIII. Today, as then, peace is in danger. One must repeat forcefully that, *"peace is not essentially about structures but about people. Certain structures and mechanisms of peace - juridical, political, economic - are of course necessary and do exist, but they have been derived from nothing other than the accumulated wisdom and experience of innumerable gestures of peace made by men and women throughout history who have kept hope and have not given in to discouragement. Gestures of peace spring from the lives of people who foster peace first of all in their own hearts"* (n. 9).

By means of a renewed missionary consciousness, today more than ever, you are called to be builders of peace. Remaining faithful and loyal to the history of your community's tradition, continue to strive to intensify everywhere prayer for peace accompanied by concrete action in favour of reconciliation and solidarity among persons and peoples.

4. May the Christian communities, and all believers in God, follow the example of Abraham, common father in the faith, while on the mountaintop he prayed the Lord to spare from destruction the cities of men (cf. Gn 18,23 ff.). With the same insistence, we should continue to beg for humanity the gift of peace.

Let us turn our confident gaze toward Christ, the *"Prince of Peace"*, who proclaims to us the Good News of salvation, the *"Gospel of Peace"*: *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"* (Mt 5,5). He calls his disciples to be witnesses and servants of the Gospel, certain that more than any human effort, it is the Holy Spirit who gives fruitfulness to their action in the world.

In renewing my gratitude to all of you for this meeting, I invoke the heavenly protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace, on each of you and on your initiatives. Assuring you of my spiritual closeness, I wholeheartedly impart my Apostolic Blessing to all who are here, to the members of the Community of Sant'Egidio spread throughout the world, and to those whom you meet in your daily activities.