



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO A GROUP OF ATHLETES

Saturday, 20 March 1982

Mr President,

Dear athletes and friends,

In anticipation of your world championship of racing which will take place tomorrow, I am happy for this opportunity to extend to you a very cordial and warm welcome to the Vatican.

I am pleased to know that the six hundred athletes who will participate in this event represent about fifty different countries; and together with them have come hundreds of journalists, radio and television operators and technicians. I hope that this international sporting event will be for all of you an occasion of much satisfaction and joy, a time to appreciate more deeply one another's gifts and friendship.

Athletic competition draws out of the human person some of his noblest qualities and talents. He must learn the secrets of his own body, its strengths and weaknesses, its stamina and its breaking point. He must develop, through long hours of exercise and effort, the power of concentration and the habit of discipline, learning how to hold his strength in reserve and to conserve his energy for that final moment when the victory depends on a great burst of speed or one last surge of strength.

These qualities and talents are important not only for sporting events, but in other areas of life as well. For the mature person is one who knows his own strengths and weaknesses, and who through discipline and persevering effort, can place these gifts at the service of others for the building up of society.

There is present among athletes a kind of universal brotherhood, a sincere respect for each

person and a lively appreciation of one another's abilities and gifts. Athletes engage in stiff competition; they like to be challenged and enjoy the excitement of a great contest. But rather than leading to rivalry and dissension, such competition, when carried out in a climate of friendship, leads to a still greater mutual respect and fraternal esteem. Thus events like that of tomorrow heighten our awareness of the value of brotherhood and of its possibility of being achieved. I have no doubt that you will make your contribution to the bulding up of this fraternal spirit.

With these few thoughts, I assure all of you of my best wishes and of a remembrance in my prayers. May Almighty God bless you and your loved ones with abundant joy.

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