



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
AL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA ITALIANA
ON. SANDRO PERTINI***

Sabato, 2 giugno 1984

The friendly, warm greeting with which you have welcomed me arouses a deep echo in my spirit. I thank you from my heart.

I thank you for the witness of friendship which you so generously offer me and which touches me deeply. In my turn, with words from the Bible, I would like to say to you what this friendship also means to me.

«A faithful friend is a life-saving remedy such as he who fears God finds» (Sir 6:16).

It is therefore also a gift for which I am grateful to God.

I am also grateful to you for what you have said about the values which evangelical teaching has indicated as an example of uplift for all men: values which must be reflected in the principles and norms of state law and which must also mirrored in international law so that all peoples, according to their natural aspiration, may live together in peaceful serenity and in harmonious industry.

Today, 2 June, Italy commemorates the birth of the Republic and of the constitutional political system which the Italian people adopted following the painful experience of the Second World War. The recognition and guarantee of man's inalienable rights, both as an individual and within the social structure in which his personality develops and matures: the undeniable duties of political, economic and social solidarity; the equal dignity and equality of all citizens before the law, without discrimination; the renouncement of war as a means of attacking the freedom of other peoples; international collaboration: here are some of the «fundamental principles», placed at the head of the basic Italian Charter, which inspire the democratic institutions of the country and give

form to the «State of law».

Today these ideals appear in Italy as a peacefully possessed heritage; but it cannot be forgotten that the Constitution of 1947 solemnly ratified them after years during which civil coexistence had been endangered and seemed destined for ruin through the inhuman event of the war. But it is also true that it was precisely during those painful years that the Italians, finding new moral strength, understood and lived the value of solidarity and brotherhood, not merely as something to be desired, but as a mutual offering of themselves. Many episodes of heroism bore witness to this, but above all the innumerable, daily acts of unselfish help offered by people of every station to anyone finding himself in need or in danger. The sharing of suffering matured spirits and led to the rediscovery of old values. It is well to remember it. As a family's experience is built upon the great trials of life happily overcome, so too for peoples the moral witnesses on which human existence is nourished assume everlasting validity, and encouragement for the future springs from them.

During our meeting of last 21 May, Mr. President, you recalled with noble words the way in which, during that sorrowful and great experience, the Church and its institutions demonstrated themselves to be sharers in the destiny of the Italian people. In fact, bishops and clergy, male and female religious, sought to protect their brothers from the onslaught of hatred, to heal their wounds, to support them morally and, as far as possible, also materially, in their yearning for peace and freedom, by inspiring faith in God and in life. And when forty years ago, on 4 June 1944, the day of liberation of the capital of Italy arrived, the Roman people gathered around their bishop in a spontaneous sign of gratitude to the «defensor civitatis» (defender of the city), and listened, convinced, to his invitation to build up the not – easy future with a «spirit of generous brotherly love».

This characteristic of generosity, which is not of secondary importance, is indeed a natural quality of the Italian people.

The «open heart», the sense of brotherly hospitality, the spontaneous solidarity which Italians foster for those who are in need, have during the past centuries, given life to an uninterrupted series of exemplary institutions in the service of man. I am thinking, among others, of the hospital services founded in the various centuries by associations and confraternities or by great men of faith and heart such as, to mention only a few, Camillo de Lellis or Giuseppe Cottolengo.

It cannot be said that it is merely past history. We see that this concern for man has not died, but continues to be expressed in institutions of the most diverse nature which it would be difficult even to list, such as in the various fields of volunteer work in which men and women of all categories and of various ages generously devote their energies and – with the enthusiasm which is proper to them and with an ever fruitful creativity– so many young people.

Mr. President, I cannot but look with admiration on your personal commitment to communicate to

the younger generations those ideals of solidarity and of peace which illuminate the history of the Italian people that they may make them their own and in their turn transmit them to future generations to give light to a freer and more fraternal community.

The Church in Italy – today so worthily represented here by the President of the Italian Episcopal Conference – feels inspired by these authentically human and truly Christian ideals. It is firm in its intention to work for their achievement in unbreakable unity with the Italian people and in its service. The recent Agreement of 18 February of this year made specific and solemn mention of this. In particular, the Church feels committed to fostering the generous initiatives – deservedly mentioned by you – to help the people of other countries struck by hunger and in support of every beneficial form of collaboration among peoples.

Mr. President, during this meeting of ours on a date so meaningful to the Italian Republic, our memory has turned thoughtfully to the past in order to open souls to renewed confidence in the future. In this way is born my deep wish, accompanied by a daily prayer to God, that the Italian people may always be able to resolve – in coherence with the moral inspirations which emerge from its history – the national and international problems which it must confront. May it be able to enjoy a future of prosperity and peace in the light of the lofty ideals to which its best spirits have borne witness. May Italy continue to set an example in the defence of human rights and of the values of freedom and justice, in the track of its European and universal vocation.

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