



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO VARIOUS PILGRIMS GROUPS

Saturday, 8 April 2000

1. Dear pilgrims, welcome! I receive you with great affection. I first greet you, dear faithful from the Diocese of Aversa and, in a special way, your Bishop Mario Milano, whom I thank for his kind words. I greet Archbishop Crescenzo Sepe, your fellow countryman and my close collaborator in all that concerns the Great Jubilee. I also greet the priests, the consecrated persons and all the lay faithful gathered here.

Your pilgrimage is, in some way, a reciprocation of the visit that I had the joy of making to your land almost 10 years ago. I still cherish a vivid memory of that visit. Then, addressing the various ecclesial members, I asked the priests to be convinced and enthusiastic about the mission entrusted to them. I reminded consecrated persons how the People of God need to recognize in them their convinced fidelity to the radical evangelizing vocation. I invited the laity to assume courageously their particular responsibilities in the Church. I gladly take up these exhortations again today, almost as a continuation of a dialogue that has never been interrupted during these years.

2. Dear brothers and sisters, continue on the path of Gospel fidelity, in the certainty that Christ, the Living One, is with you yesterday, today and for ever (cf. *Heb* 13: 8). It is he who is the solid rock on which the unshakeable faith of his every disciple must rest. It is he who is the door to salvation, which you must pass through during this pilgrimage. You will return to your homes strengthened in your faith and motivated by the desire to serve the Gospel cause even more generously, by walking with courage in the footsteps of your ancestors and enriching with your contribution the precious heritage received from them.

May the example of St Paul, titular of your cathedral and a tireless apostle and missionary, be an effective example for you in this progress. Follow his example, dear friends, and make his

sentiments and his apostolic strength your own. Always be united among yourselves and with your Bishop.

3. I know of your intense pastoral activity in every field of evangelization. I also know of your praiseworthy efforts to be close to the weakest and most forgotten members of society, especially with regard to youth unemployment and the situation of less well-off families. Be witnesses to solidarity. The prophetic mission, typical of the Christian community, cannot fail to spur you to be effective heralds in your environment; the noble mission commits you therefore to prepare, as far as your capacity and means permit, initiatives that can alleviate the sufferings caused by phenomena such as marginalization, unequal wages and social hardship.

In particular, look to young people. May "a Church for the young and with the young" be your community's goal. This involves an enlightened pastoral plan that looks to the future. It will also help you to strengthen your pastoral care of vocations, which has been taking place in the Diocese for some time. I would like to recall, in this regard, that even in times of crisis, your Diocese has never been without priests and religious, and that many of them are currently in the service of the Holy See. Thank you for your generosity.

The family also rightly holds an important place in your pastoral programme because the first transmission of faith takes place in it; it is in the family that the values and noble traditions of your land are perpetuated, starting with the defence of life, that most precious gift of God, love and respect for the elderly, and peaceful collaboration between old and new generations.

4. Dear faithful of Aversa, I entrust you all to the Mother of Christ, whom you love profoundly, as shown by the miniature "House of Loreto", enshrined in your cathedral; the Shrine of Casapesenna, whose foundation stone I blessed 15 years ago; the icon of Our Lady of Casaluce, co-patroness of the Diocese, before which princes, kings and emperors have prayed; the Shrine of Our Lady of the Annunciation visited by distinguished figures such as King Ludwig of Hungary and Queen Maria Casimira of Poland, and the Church of Our Lady of Briano. May it be she who guides your steps in your fidelity to Christ and his Gospel.

5. I now extend a cordial greeting to the pilgrims from the Dioceses of Gorizia, Cesena and Ischia, here with their Bishops. Dear brothers and sisters, the image that your diocesan communities are called to offer is one of well-structured and harmonious unity. The Church's various members, in fact, form one body, united in the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the love of the Father, who revealed himself in Christ, Our Lord.

One deposit of truth, unflinching hope, sincere love: these are the characteristics that must mark the Church's presence in the world. May it be your constant concern to bear witness to your love for Christ and to proclaim his Gospel with your words and example. In this way, you will always be ready to account for the hope that is in you (cf. 1 Pt 3: 15).

6. I also greet the superiors and seminarians of the Pontifical Regional Seminary of Molfetta, the faithful of the parishes of the Deanery of Val d'Elsa, of the Diocese of Siena, and the members of the Archconfraternity of the Most Holy Trinity of Naples.

Dear friends, let yourselves be formed by Christ, so that your lives, enriched by his grace, will be fervent testimonies of his love for all mankind. In passing through the Holy Door of the Jubilee, draw from him the strength necessary to be his faithful disciples. Dear seminarians, dear faithful, may you always be aware of the call to holiness which God asks of each of you. May you know how to respond to his grace, to give full meaning to your existence.

7. Lastly, I greet you, dear members of the Capitoline Camper Club, and you, dear members of the Cooperative Credit Bank of Cascia di Regello in the province of Florence. May you always be filled with sentiments of charity, which is the fullness of Christian law. Moved by solidarity, you will be able to start beneficial initiatives for alleviating the many forms of poverty of today's society.

May God help each one of you and render fruitful your every effort in the service of good.
I cordially bless you all.

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