



The Holy See

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

Monday, 4 December 2000

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

1. I am pleased to extend a cordial welcome to you at this special audience being held during Advent, which has just begun. I greet you all with great affection and hope that your visit to the tombs of the Apostles and your meetings in these days will deepen everyone's commitment of fidelity to Christ, sense of communion with the universal Church and zeal in bearing witness to the Gospel.

2. I first greet you, dear brothers and sisters of the *International Forum of Catholic Action*, holding an assembly during these days here in Rome. I greet the Bishops present and the national presidents who have gathered for the assembly. I extend a special greeting to Bishop Agostino Superbo, whom I thank for the courteous words he just addressed to me, expressing the sentiments shared by the other participants.

Your presence today is meant as a sign of renewed fidelity to the Church and a commitment to continue with ever greater enthusiasm on the path of the new evangelization. Catholic Action, like every other group, association and ecclesiastical movement, is called to be an authentic school of Christian perfection. That is, it is called to be that "school of faith" which, as I said to the young participants in the unforgettable [Prayer Vigil at Tor Vergata](#) during [World Youth Day](#), helps to form true disciples and apostles of the Lord. Continue, dear friends, to deepen your search for God.

May your hearts always be open to the great apostolic expectations and challenges of our time. Grow in an authentic ecclesial spirit, nourished by study of the Council documents, whose teaching is always timely. Be faithful to the guidelines I set down in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation [Christifideles laici](#). Thus you will be an ever greater resource for the whole Church on her way to the third Christian millennium.

3. By returning to the sources of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, you will be able to grasp more clearly the

characteristic features of your association, especially its ecclesial, secular and organic nature, in constant collaboration with your respective Pastors. These are the essential traits that define the face of Catholic Action, despite its various acronyms and names, in so many parts of the world.

If the progress of the communities in which you work sometimes seems slow or difficult to you, do not be discouraged, but increase your love and your efforts to make the Church's image ever more splendid by your holiness of life and apostolic zeal.

In your mission as humble servants of the unity of God's People, be constantly inspired by the examples and teachings of the saints and blessed who were formed within your association: I am thinking in particular of the holy Mexican martyrs and of Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati, Gianna Beretta Molla, Pierina Morosini, Antonia Mesina and Sr Gabriella of Unity.

May you be guided and protected by Mary, the Immaculate Virgin, whom you are especially honoured to invoke as Mother and Queen of Catholic Action.

4. It gives me great joy to welcome Cardinal Thomas Winning and the Bishops, priests and seminarians gathered in Rome for the celebrations marking the fourth centenary of the foundation of the Pontifical Scots College. Grateful to His Eminence for his kind words, I am pleased also to extend a warm greeting to the Secretary of State for Scotland and the First Minister, as well as other distinguished visitors and benefactors who are honouring this occasion with their presence.

It was exactly 400 years ago, during the Jubilee Year 1600, that Pope Clement VIII, by the Bull *In supremo militantis Ecclesiae*, established the College at a time of political and religious upheaval in your country. In this anniversary year, I join you in giving thanks for all that the College has represented for the Church in Scotland, and in particular for the many generations of priests trained in the College who have spent themselves generously in the service of God and his people.

Their example should be a source of inspiration to you, the present generation of students, as you prepare to proclaim the Gospel to the people of our time. You do so, conscious of contemporary challenges and difficulties, but with the conviction that Jesus Christ, who is "the same, yesterday, today and for ever" (*Heb 13: 8*), is the only fully satisfying answer to the most profound yearnings of the human heart.

During your years in Rome, in this city made holy by the blood of the martyrs and the lives of many other saintly men and women, I encourage you to follow their example by developing a deep intimacy with the Lord and becoming men of intense prayer. In your studies, seek always the truth and wisdom that will enable you to answer the fundamental questions affecting people's lives. Be always aflame with the love of Jesus Christ, so that in seeing you others will be led to him and his kingdom.

The task of the Pontifical Scots College at the dawn of the new millennium is to move ahead with confidence, fulfilling its mission to train priests "after the heart of Christ", imbued with zeal for the spread of the Gospel. Its distinguished past must encourage you to ensure an even more glorious future! I entrust you and your families, and the whole Church in Scotland, to the intercession of St Andrew and St Margaret, and to the protection of Mary, Mother of priests.

5. Thanking Archbishop François Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận for his kind words this morning, I warmly welcome him and the participants in the seminar organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and other Catholic agencies on the theme *From Debt Relief to Poverty Reduction*.

In the message which I have addressed to you, I have stressed the need to ensure that the efforts made in this Jubilee Year to find solutions to the heavy debt burdens of the poorest countries do not cease, but continue to bear fruit in the years to come. We cannot permit fatigue or inertia to weaken our commitment, when the lives of the poorest in our world are at stake.

The Jubilee is centred on the person of Jesus Christ: may he who came "to proclaim the good news to the poor" (Mt 11: 5) assist you in your reflections and strengthen you in hope. May almighty God abundantly bless you and your families.

Last but not least, I extend a special greeting to the Daughters of St Mary of Providence, present with a group of sick and disabled people whom they care for. Dear friends: may the Lord be your comfort, strength and joy.

6. My affectionate thoughts now turn to you, dear Sisters Handmaids of the Incarnation, who this Holy Year are joyfully commemorating your institute's 50th anniversary. This providential coincidence not only highlights the connection between your religious family and the celebration of these two Jubilees, but above all proposes once again the centrality of the Mystery of the Incarnation, which inspires your spirituality and apostolate.

In following the examples and teachings of the Camillian Fr Primo Fiocchi and Mother Annunziata Montereali, your congregation is in fact committed to humbly living in the Church and for the Church, showing to the contemporary world the image of the Incarnate Word and discovering the face of Christ in the face of every human being. The effectiveness of your apostolic activity flows from contemplation of Christ, the Incarnate Word, who took upon himself the human condition, humbling himself even to the Cross.

Aware of the timeliness of your charism, you have brought the message of the Incarnation not only to the various regions of Italy where, for some time now, you have been involved in catechesis, in the formation of children and in assistance to the sick and the elderly, but also to other countries, thus opening yourselves to a promising missionary horizon. May the Lord make this apostolic work fruitful. I ardently hope that the celebration of your 50th anniversary during the Jubilee Year will especially strengthen you in contemplation of the Incarnate Word and in the desire to serve the Son of God in your brethren, especially the poorest and most suffering.

7. Dear brothers and sisters! As I again express to all of you here my deep gratitude for today's meeting and my most cordial wishes for your apostolic, formational and charitable activities, I hope that the celebration of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 will inspire in each of you a more ardent spiritual zeal and a courageous witness to the Gospel.

With these sentiments, I invoke the heavenly protection of the Immaculate Virgin, Mother of the Incarnate Word, and cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you and to your communities.

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