



## The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY OF SANT'EGIDIO**

*Friday, 8 February 2002*

*Beloved Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I am particularly happy to greet you while you take part in the Fourth International Meeting of Bishops and Priests, friends of the Community of Sant'Egidio. You have come to Rome from various parts of the world to spend a few days reflecting together on the *primacy of holiness and prayer* in the Church's mission. I know that persons belonging to other Churches and Ecclesial Communities have also joined your meeting. I welcome them with joy and greet them as brothers. The beginning of this millennium asks great fidelity in obeying the Gospel, and in the quest for unity of all Christ's followers.

In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, in which I point out certain priorities for the Church after the Jubilee, I urged her to "put out into the deep" courageously, into the sea of the new millennium. We do not set out trusting in our own poor strength, but in the certainty of the Lord's help, as he assured us when he ascended to Heaven: "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the world" (Mt 28,20). Holiness and prayer are among the crucial requisites of the Church's journey: "This training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 32). "Yes, dear brothers and sisters, our Christian communities", I concluded, "must become genuine "schools' of prayer" (*ibid*, n. 33). The Sant'Egidio Community has drawn the strength of its love precisely from its dedication to being "a school of prayer". Every evening in Rome your members gather to pray in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere. And the members of the community do the same, in churches scattered in many parts of the world.

2. Your reflections during these days and the resolutions you will make are bound to equip you

spiritually and pastorally for the times ahead. The century that has just begun is waiting for the Gospel to be communicated "*sine glossa*" (literally, without comment), as St Francis loved to say; it is waiting for disciples who are in every way coherent witnesses. Before us stands the array of countless Bishops, priests and faithful who in the 20th century gave their lives for the Gospel. May the strong witness of these "new martyrs", whom I especially wanted to commemorate during the Jubilee, be a precious heritage for us all.

I am certain that friendship with the Sant'Egidio Community has helped you personally and ecclesially. I met the community at the very beginning of my Pontificate, and have been able to ascertain its spiritual vitality and missionary passion. I have seen it working in the Church of Rome and moving out on the highways of the world. I would like to recall a lovely hymn that the community takes with it everywhere: "We do not have any wealth, but only the Word of the Lord".

This hymn, in which Peter's words to the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple (cf. Acts 3,6) resound, reminds us that the Gospel is the true force of the Church and her riches. This was so in early times and is still the same today, when she moves into the new century.

3. I know that yesterday you celebrated the anniversary of the Sant'Egidio Community, in the Basilica of St John Lateran, the Cathedral of Rome. While I thank Bishop Vincenzo Paglia for his words, I warmly greet Prof. Andrea Riccardi, who began the Community's journey that 7 February 1968. Thirty-four years have now passed. They have been years of listening to the Gospel and of friendship with everyone. One could say that *friendship stamps every dimension of the life of the Sant'Egidio Community*. Friendship lived with sensitivity of the Gospel is an effective way of being Christian in the world: it makes it possible to cross frontiers and to shorten distances, even when they seem insurmountable. It is a question of a real art, the art of encounter, of careful attention to dialogue, of loving passion for communicating the Gospel. This friendship becomes a reconciling force; it is really needed in our time, so tragically famous for wars and violent clashes.

4. We have just celebrated the Meeting for the Day of Prayer for Peace in the city of St Francis. Since the first meeting in 1986, every year, your community has organized meetings that have brought the "spirit of Assisi" to life under the heavens of many European cities. It has given birth to an exceptional movement of men and women of different religions who, without any confusion, do not cease begging from God for peace for all the peoples.

May the beginning of this millennium, venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood, friends of the Community of Sant'Egidio, find you all attentive to the Lord's call so that you may "put out into the deep" to communicate to all peoples the Gospel of love. With this wish, as I assure you of my prayer, I warmly bless you.

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