



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 14th GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF ITALIAN CATHOLIC ACTION**

Dear friends of Italian Catholic Action!

You are meeting at your General Assembly with the theme: *Live the faith, love life: Catholic Action's educative commitment*, in order to emphasize your love for Christ and the Church and renew the journey of your Association, with the commitment to assume fully your responsibilities as laymen and women in the service of the Gospel. You are children, young people and adults who make yourselves available to the Lord in the Church by a public, solemn commitment to give good witness in every area of life, in communion with your Pastors. Yours is a grass-roots presence in parishes, families, neighbourhoods, and social environments: a presence that you live in your everyday life and in your desire for holiness. Your children, adolescents and young people all want to be lively and happy, generous and courageous, like Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati. You enthusiastically build the city of all with dedication and courageously serve in the institutions, just as Vittorio Bachelet, Bl. Alberto Marvelli did, and Giuseppe Toniolo, who will soon be declared Blessed. In your project of human and Christian formation you desire to be faithful friends of Christ, like Bl. Pierina Morosini and Bl. Antonia Mesina, like Venerable Armida Barelli. You want to make our communities come alive with children who are charming because of the purity of their heart, like Antonietta Meo, and who are capable of drawing also parents to Jesus. When I receive your young people at Christmas or during the month of peace, I always admire the genuineness with which they communicate the Lord's joy.

In October last year I met with your adolescents and young people, committed and festive, loving the true freedom that leads them towards a generous life, direct involvement in the apostolate. They have before them the example of men and women who are happy in their faith, who want to accompany the new generations with love, wisdom and prayer, who seek to patiently construct the fabric of community life and confront the most burning problems of daily life in the family: the defence of life, the suffering caused by separation and abandonment, solidarity in difficulty,

welcoming the poor and those without a homeland. You are helped by chaplains who know quite well what it means to educate to holiness. In the dioceses you are called to collaborate with your Bishops, in a manner that is constant, faithful and direct, in the Church's life and mission. None of this happens automatically, only by a generous response to God's call to live in total responsibility one's Baptism, the dignity of being Christian. For this reason you form an association with precise ideals and qualities, as the [Second Vatican Council](#) indicates: an association having the apostolic aim of the Church, that cooperates with the hierarchy, that is expressed as an organic body and has an explicit mandate from the Church (cf. Decree [Apostolicam Actuositatem](#), n. 20). On the basis of what you are, dear friends, in the footsteps of my venerated Predecessors I would like to entrust to you some thoughts about your commitment.

1. Educative perspective

Along the lines mapped out by the Bishops for the churches in Italy, you are particularly called to make the best of your educative vocation. Catholic Action is an expert educative force, supported by good tools, with more than a century of tradition. You know how to educate children through the ACR, you know how to set up educational programmes for adolescents and young people, you are experienced in offering ongoing formation to adults. Your action will be more effective if, as you are already doing, you act in unison within a profoundly focused perspective and foster cooperation with the other educational forces, both ecclesial and civil. In order to educate it is necessary to look beyond the occasional, the immediate moment, and with the collaboration of all construct a plan of Christian life founded on the Gospel and the Church's Magisterium, placing at its core an integral vision of the person. Your Formative Project is valid for many Christians and men and women of good will, especially if they can see in you as models of Christian life, full of generous and joyous commitment, a deep interior life and ecclesial communion.

2. The proposal of holiness

Your associations are "gymnasiums" of holiness, in which one trains for a total dedication to the cause of the Kingdom of God, for a profoundly evangelical life that characterizes you as lay faithful in the sphere of your daily life. This demands intense prayer, both communal and personal, a continuous listening to the Word of God, an assiduous sacramental life. It is necessary to make the word "holiness" a common word, not something exceptional, one that not only designates heroic degrees of Christian life, but that shows in the reality of everyday a decisive response and openness to the action of the Holy Spirit.

3. Formation for cultural and political involvement

For you, holiness means committing yourselves to the service of the common good according to Christian principles, offering in civic life a presence that is knowledgeable, free, rigorous in your behaviour, faithful to the Church's Magisterium and directed towards the good of everyone.

Formation for cultural and political involvement therefore is an important task for you, one that requires thinking shaped by the Gospel, capable of upholding ideas and proposals that are valid for the laity. This is a commitment that is fulfilled first and foremost in daily life, with mothers and fathers facing the new challenges of the education of children, workers and students, with cultural centres oriented towards serving the growth of all. Italy has gone through difficult periods of history and emerged with new energy also thanks to the unconditional dedication of the Catholic laity actively involved in politics and in her institutions. Today the public life of the Nation requires a further generous response on the part of believers, so that they can place their own capacities and their spiritual, intellectual and moral energy at the disposal of all.

4. A broad-based dedication in the face of the great upheaval of the world and the Mediterranean

Last of all, I ask you to be generous, welcoming, solidary and most of all communicators of the beauty of the faith. Many men, women and young people come into contact with our world, which they know only superficially, bewildered by illusory images, and they need not to lose hope, nor to barter their dignity. They need bread, work, freedom, justice, peace, they need to see their inalienable rights as children of God recognized. They need faith, and we can help them by respecting their religious convictions, in a free and serene exchange, offering with simplicity, frankness and zeal our faith in Jesus Christ. In the history of Italy, Catholic Action played a great role in its construction — as [I wrote to the President of the Republic on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Unification of Italy](#) — making the effort to combine love of country with faith in God. Rooted in all of the National territory, today too it can contribute to the creation of a culture that is popular, widespread, positive and helps to form responsible individuals who are capable of placing themselves at the country's service, as it did during that period in which the Constitution was drafted and the Nation was rebuilt after the Second World War. Catholic Action can help Italy to respond to its particular vocation, placed as it is on the Mediterranean, a crossroads of cultures, aspirations, and tensions that demand a great effort communion, solidarity and generosity. Italy has always offered to peoples near and far the wealth of her culture and her faith, of her art and her thought. Today you lay Christians are called to offer with conviction the beauty of your culture and the reason for your faith, besides fraternal solidarity, so that Europe may respond to the current epochal challenge.

In addressing my most cordial good wishes to the whole Assembly, I greet your President, Professor Franco Miano, the General Assistant, Bishop Domenico Sigalini, and all the delegates, and to each and every member of the great family of Italian Catholic Action I impart a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 6 May 2011

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