



# The Holy See

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## **MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II**

### **TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS**

**OF CATHOLIC ACTION** 1. "*Duc in altum, Azione Cattolica. Abbi il coraggio del futuro!*" [Put out into the deep, Catholic Action. Face the future with courage!]. This was the invitation I addressed to the delegates at the 11th National Assembly of Italian Catholic Action on 26 April 2002. I am pleased to note that my appeal met with approval and has been adopted as the commitment and motto for the International Congress on Catholic Action that will be opening in Rome on 31 August 2004, organized by the International Forum of Catholic Action and Italian Catholic Action in collaboration with the Pontifical Council for the Laity. I would like to extend my most cordial greetings to all the Catholic Action directors and chaplains from the various countries who have gathered at the *Domus Pacis*. I greet with special fraternal affection the Cardinals and my Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate who have wished to take part in this important event. 2. "Facing the future with courage" is an attitude that does not stem from a voluntary choice but draws its consistency and dynamism from the memory of how precious a gift Catholic Action has been since it came into being. According to my Predecessor Pope Pius XI of venerable memory, it stemmed from a "providential inspiration" and was a cohesive force that gave structure and an impetus to that contemporary trend of the "promotion of the laity" that was solemnly confirmed by the Second Vatican Council. Generations of the faithful have developed their vocations in Catholic Action, through a process of Christian formation that brought them to full awareness of their co-responsibility in building the Church and fostered their apostolic zeal in all walks of life. How can we forget on this occasion that the Conciliar Decree on the apostolate of the laity recognized this praiseworthy tradition and warmly recommended it (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 20)? The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, in addition to my numerous Addresses to the various Assemblies of Italian Catholic Action, acted enthusiastically on the Council's recommendations, encouraging the effort to overcome certain unclear or difficult situations. Today I am eager to repeat once again: the Church needs Catholic Action! Our memories of it must not be reduced to a nostalgic withdrawal into the past but must grow into awareness that the Holy Spirit has made a precious gift to the Church, a heritage that is called, at the dawn of this third millennium, to bring forth new fruits of holiness and of the apostolate, extending the "implantation" of the Association to many other local Churches in different countries. 3. The time has come for this reactivation, as the many forms of your presence testify. There are a wealth of signs that promise hope in the *kairos* of a new springtime of the Gospel! This great responsibility that involves all of you together with your Pastors as well as the whole Church asks for a humble and courageous decision "to start afresh from Christ", in the knowledge that you are supported by the omnipresent power of the Holy Spirit. All the lay faithful, conscious of their own baptismal vocation and of the three commitments that stem from it - priestly, prophetic and royal - may be involved in this great task. Trusting in the grace of God and sustained by a keen sense of belonging to the Church as "homes and schools of communion", lay people should listen to the teachings and instructions of their Pastors to be their effective collaborators in building the Ecclesial

Communities to which they belong. Every Christian is bound to witness to the great changes in his life, worked by grace and motivated by charity. "This will be possible if the lay faithful are able to overcome in themselves the separation of the Gospel from life, to again take up in their daily activities in family, work and society, an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel" (*Christifideles Laici*, n. 34). Catholic Action has always been and must still be today a nursery for the formation of the faithful who, enlightened by the social teaching of the Church, are employed on the front line to defend the sacred gift of life, the preservation of the dignity of the human person, the achievement of educational freedom, the promotion of the true meaning of marriage and the family, the practice of charity to the neediest, the quest for peace and justice and the application to the different interactive social realities of the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity.<sup>4</sup> I know that your Congress, which began in Rome, will continue with your pilgrimage to Loreto and will culminate on Sunday, 5 September, with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the Vallata of Montorso, during which I will be pleased to add to the Roll of the Blessed some of the members of Catholic Action who consistently and convincingly modelled their life on the Gospel. I am thus preparing once again to set out as a pilgrim to that beloved Shrine of Loreto, an international centre of Marian spirituality, where I will pray to Mary Most Holy that with the grace of the Holy Spirit you may always be disposed to say your *fiat* to God's will, making yourselves witnesses of the Mystery of Christ for the world's salvation. As I wish you great success with the work of the Congress, with a view to an ever more effective presence of Catholic Action in the service of Christ's Kingdom, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all. *From Castel Gandolfo, 10 August 2004* JOHN PAUL II