



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ORGANIZATION
"VERY SPECIAL ARTS INTERNATIONAL"**

Saturday, 5 December 1987

*Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,*

1. I am pleased to greet most cordially representatives from around the world who are affiliated with the organization "*Very Special Arts International*". You have come to this meeting in Rome because you share a common love and concern for our handicapped brothers and sisters. You are not only concerned, you are deeply committed to enriching their life in its many dimensions, especially through the world of art. It is indeed a pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican today. I assure you that the Church, like yourselves, is particularly close to those who are weak or disabled in any way. And she is proud to number very many of them among her own members.

2. Every human life is sacred, for each person is created in the image and likeness of God. Saint Paul says: "We are *God's work of art*, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it" (*Eph. 2, 10*). Our worth, then, our dignity as human persons, comes not from what we can say and do, but from *our very being*, from the fact that God loves us and that he has created us to live in joy in his presence for ever.

The lives of those who are handicapped are no less sacred than the lives of those who are not. I know that you share this conviction with me. At the same time, we are also aware that the quality of life of the handicapped is often not in keeping with their own inner worth. Here I am thinking not merely of the quality of life which comes from the special services and the practical assistance that our brothers and sisters may need. Rather I am referring to their desire and their right to participate in an authentic way in *social and cultural life*. It is precisely in this sphere that you have chosen to concentrate your efforts. And I wholeheartedly applaud your choice.

3. The Church has always favoured the arts. In fact, the Gospel of Jesus Christ which she proclaims has inspired countless artists, men and women - a number of whom were handicapped - whose works of art have enriched the world. Authentic works of art give expression to *the greatness and wonder of the mystery of human life*. They reflect our thirst for the infinite, and at the same time they evoke it. They stand as eloquent sentinels, protecting the human race from trends and fashions which would deny or water down the spiritual dimension of human existence. The arts elevate and console; they inspire and give hope. They help the human spirit rise towards God and towards the most important values in life.

And the arts are the exclusive possession of no one. As you have rightly emphasized, "In art there are no handicaps". For, while the body may know various limitations, the spirit is free to soar. And the arts are primarily an expression of the spiritual dimension of a person, of the deepest desires and the greatest beauty that the Spirit of God gives to the heart and soul. The festivals and other events which you have organized bear witness to this fact, demonstrating the many artistic gifts of our handicapped brothers and sisters.

Dear friends, in closing I wish to offer you the assurance of my personal interest and prayerful support. May the Lord strengthen you in your worthy efforts to promote art for the handicapped. Upon you and your families, and upon all those whom you seek to serve, I invoke God's abundant gifts of peace and joy.

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