



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC***

Quirinale, 20 October 1998

Mr President,

1. Here I am again in this historic palace, the residence of the highest official of the Italian Republic, for a visit which has been planned for a long time and officially announced last month. Thank you for the courteous welcome you have given me, conveying the sentiments of the Italian people. Thank you for the attention with which, while recognizing their respective responsibilities, you work to achieve that collaboration between the State and Church “for human advancement and the good of the nation”, which was among the desires expressed in the Agreements of 18 February 1984. Today’s visit follows other productive meetings and shows that in Italy co-operation between Church and State can have beneficial effects on the concrete life of the Italian citizen and on institutions. I can only rejoice at this and publicly thank the Lord on such a significant occasion.

2. I am here today as the Successor of Peter and Pastor of the universal Church. Indeed, it is from Rome — from “our” Rome — that I have been granted to exercise this apostolic mission. By virtue of the mandate entrusted to me by Christ, who appointed me Bishop of Rome and Primate of Italy, even though I come from a distant country, I feel completely Roman and Italian. My involvement in the history of this city and of Italy is not only a formal fact: with the passing of time, there has been an increase in my heartfelt participation in the life of a people to whom Providence brought me as a young man, when, after my priestly ordination, I was sent by my Bishop to complete my academic studies in this city. At the time I could already sense the vivacious humanity and sincere piety of Romans. I will always remember Via del Quirinale, because I lived at number 26 in that street, at the Belgium College. Every day in the morning and afternoon, I walked the Via del Quirinale, passing by the Presidential Palace. It was from 1946 to 1948. This closeness was later

deepened during my frequent visits to Rome and strengthened during the Second Vatican Council. By appointing me Cardinal, my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, made me a member of the Roman clergy, assigning me the Title of St Caesarius on the Palatine. Then, on the afternoon of 16 October 20 years ago, the Lord called me to become Successor of Peter, binding my life to Italy forever in his mysterious plan. But I would like to mention other circumstances. It was here in Italy, especially at Monte Cassino, where my classmates fought. Many of them lost their lives and are buried near Ancona and elsewhere. In a certain sense, they too prepared the way for me. In these 20 years of Pontificate, I have increasingly shared in the joys and sufferings, the problems and hopes of the Italian nation, establishing close relations during my pastoral visits and frequent meetings with the faithful of every religion, and welcoming the expressions of esteem and affection everywhere.

3. Rome and the See of Peter! For 2,000 years these two realities, despite the succession of individuals and institutions, have been meeting and engaging each other. Down the centuries this relationship has endured many vicissitudes, in which moments of light and shadow were intermingled. Nevertheless, it is apparent to all that they belong to each other and that it is impossible to understand the history of one without referring to the mission of the other. This particular relationship over the centuries highlights how these two institutions have benefited from their providential closeness. Rome and the Italian people owe to the presence of Peter and his Successors the greatest treasure of their spiritual heritage and cultural identity: the Christian faith. Here we cannot fail to think of the amazing vistas of art, law, literature, urban structures and charitable works, as well as the varied legacy of popular traditions and customs, which are an eloquent expression of the deep-rooted and fortunate presence of Christianity in the life of the Italian people. From these riches of humanity and culture, the Church of Christ later drew valuable resources for spreading the Gospel to every part of the world.

4. The energetic harmony between Italy and the Catholic Church must now be strengthened and indeed intensified in preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. With this celebration Christians want to give thanks to the Lord for the decisive event of the Incarnation of the Son of God and to prepare to cross the threshold of the third millennium spiritually renewed. The Jubilee is primarily a spiritual event, an occasion for reconciliation and conversion, offered to Christ's followers and to all people of goodwill so that they can become the soul and ferment of the new millennium, marked by true justice and genuine peace. Our century has known the tragedies caused by ideologies which, in opposing every form of religion, deluded themselves that they could build a society without God or even contrary to God. May the forthcoming Jubilee offer everyone the opportunity to reflect on the urgent responsibility of building a world that will be a "human home" for all, with full respect for human life from its beginning to its natural end. In this regard, Christians have the mission of proclaiming and testifying that Christ is the centre and heart of the new humanity, in order to make the "civilization of love" a reality. The Jubilee will also be a valuable opportunity for the Italian people to rediscover their authentic identity and to commit themselves, in the light of the great Christian values of their own tradition, to building a new era of

progress and fraternal harmony.

5. The commitment and co-operation of all will ensure that the next Holy Year is another chapter in the extraordinary history of fidelity to the Gospel and of its willing acceptance which distinguishes Italy. One naturally thinks of the abundant number of saints among the Italian people. We must also remember the countless ranks of priests and religious who were teachers and inspired so much good in every corner of Italy and in so many parts of the world. And what can we say of all the parents who, with their discreet, loving and faithful dedication, have passed on to their children models of life that are unusually rich in human and Christian wisdom? It is precisely in looking at these results and at the formative role of the family on which they depend that I feel it my duty to make an anguished appeal that this primordial institution be protected and supported in accordance with the plan willed by the Creator. It is in the steadfast fidelity of husband and wife and in their generous openness to life that the resources are found for the moral and civil growth of the country. Healthy families, healthy country: we must not be deluded that we can have one without being concerned about what is necessary to have the other. A healthy family can pass on the values on which every ordered society is based, starting with the fundamental value of life: the degree of a people's civilization is measured by the extent of their respect for this value. In this light, I hope that every effort will be made for the prompt and enlightened defence of every expression of human life, to overcome the scourge of abortion and to prevent any form of legalized euthanasia. In the broad context of service to life, I also hope that the principles of freedom and pluralism contained in the Italian Constitution will be reflected in appropriate legislation, including the right of parents to choose the type of education they consider best suited to their children's cultural development. All this entails not only that the right to learning be effectively guaranteed, but that they be given the possibility of choosing the type of school they prefer without discrimination or penalization, as is already the case in most European countries.

6. Love and concern for Italy urge me to recall the serious problems still afflicting the nation, the most important of which is unemployment. I would also like to express my solidarity and concern for the many immigrants, for the victims of kidnapping and violence, for young people who are wondering anxiously about their future. In this regard, I express my deep appreciation for everyone who is working to solve these problems in institutions and in the many praiseworthy forms of volunteer service. In recent years the Church has not only accompanied Italian events with the "*Great Prayer for Italy*", but with the timely offer of guidance and ideals to help the nation recover its very soul and make its great heritage of faith and culture fruitful. I am very aware of the difficult moment Italy is experiencing, and I assure you of a constant remembrance in my prayer to the Lord for this people who are so dear to me.

Mr President, on this solemn occasion my wish is that the Italian nation, mindful of its traditions and faithful to civil and spiritual values which distinguish it, will draw from this great wealth of potential the guidance and energy to reach the goals of authentic morality, prosperity and justice to which it aspires, and to offer the assembly of nations its distinguished contribution to the cause

of development and peace.

With these wishes, as I invoke the intercession of your patron saints, especially of the Virgin Mary, so tenderly loved in every corner of this country, I hope that you and all Italians will be constantly blessed by the Lord.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n.43 p.9, 10.*

©Copyright - Libreria Editrice Vaticana