



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II TO
ADULT MEMBERS OF ITALIAN CATHOLIC ACTION**

Saturday, 5 September 1998

1. *"Adults together: Pilgrims of hope"*.

Dear brothers and sisters, these are the words that accompanied the course of your preparation for this national meeting in the See of Peter. I welcome you with affection. I greet your General Chaplain, Bishop Agostino Superbo, and the National President and Vice-Presidents, and am deeply grateful for their warm words on behalf of you all. I extend an affectionate welcome to the Cardinals and Bishops present. I also greet the Prime Minister, Hon. Romano Prodi, the Mayor of Rome and all those who have honoured this meeting with their presence.

You have called yourselves pilgrims, dear adults of Catholic Action, who are advancing with hope towards the Jubilee of the Year 2000. This date, which marks our entry into the new millennium, needs men and women *who can look joyfully to the future*. It needs women and men who can build that future with trust and hard work, striving to direct all temporal affairs to God. You are adult pilgrims who share the Church's vision as she passes through temporal events towards the heavenly homeland: "Sunday after Sunday the Church moves towards the final 'Lord's Day', that Sunday which knows no end" (*Dies Domini*, n. 37).

Your journey did not only start today. Yours is a long pilgrimage which has been traversing the history of this country for a long time. This is why you wanted to begin your national assembly yesterday by meeting in Viterbo at the grave of Mario Fani who, together with Giovanni Acquaderni, founded the "Catholic Youth Society" 130 years ago. Since then, profoundly holy men and women have marked your journey. I will just mention one of the most eminent, Ven. Giuseppe Toniolo, the 80th anniversary of whose death occurs this year.

They are men and women of the past who sowed the seed so that you, the adults of today, may be ready to take up your responsibilities as you face the difficult and fascinating present.

2. Being adult is not a condition that is merely acquired with age. Rather it is *an identity that should be formed* by having sound guideposts wherever we are called to live. Being lay Christian adults is a vocation that must be acknowledged, accepted and practised. This is why as adult members of Catholic Action you see yourselves as continual pilgrims through history. You are walking on the paths of history “together”.

Your association has been recognized by the Magisterium as *a form of ministry for the local Church*, with the aim of serving her in the Diocese and the parish, as well as in places and situations where people have their own human experiences.

This service, inherent in your being lay adults in the Church and in the world, finds its source in Baptism and Confirmation. For many, it is later confirmed by Matrimony; for everyone, it receives its principal strength from the Eucharist.

Through the sacramental life and by strengthening the primacy of the spiritual life, you are called to make your contribution to building the Church as a home “*living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters*” (*Christifideles laici*, n. 26). Thus you must be committed to being a *living home*, where every member feels part of one family. Indeed, as Catholic Action, you must be a family of families, in which the dignity and subjectivity of every family is defended and has an active role in pastoral action.

3. Everyone must bring his own gifts, his own skills. No one should feel useless or a burden, since the Lord assigns a task to everyone. The Church grows rich in apostolic energy when these individual gifts are placed at the service of the whole community.

May your membership in Catholic Action thus be understood as a *service to the growth of ecclesial communion*: a communion which must not be expressed in vague affection alone, but must be put into practice as *an organized solidarity between all the members of the local Church*. Moreover, as an association that exists throughout Italy, you must work with all your strength to reinforce communion between all the Churches in Italy and between the latter and the Church of Rome, which presides in charity.

The unbreakable link with the hierarchy, and in particular with the Successor of Peter, belongs to the very nature of your association. May your love for the Pope continue to be expressed in that joyful and prompt acceptance of his Magisterium which is proper to your long-standing tradition.

4. Your association wishes to be *a home among the homes of men*. This expresses your missionary dimension. The Second Vatican Council already assigned a necessary role to Catholic Action in “the implanting and growth of the Christian community” (*Ad gentes*, n. 15). For you, this means rediscovering today that missionary zeal which is also necessary for the Churches of age-old Christianity. As I said about these in *Redemptoris missio*, there are “entire groups of the baptized [who] have lost a living sense of the faith or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel” (n. 33).

Moreover, the urgent need to “re-make the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community” (*Christifideles laici*, n. 34) has

become even more pressing today. This is why your apostolic action must acquire *a cultural dimension*; it must be capable, that is, of creating among people a mentality that stems from inalienable Christian values and is interwoven with them.

May your formation therefore be ever more attentive and open to the problems raised by society today. May it also be able to create that political culture which in every age and in every way works for the common good and the preservation of values. A culture which knows how to nurture human life: “This is a particularly pressing need at the present time, when the ‘culture of death’ so forcefully opposes the ‘culture of life’ and often seems to have the upper hand” (*Evangelium vitae*, n. 87).

5. Dear brothers and sisters, the Pope urges you to continue to be pilgrims of hope, concerned for the future of every woman and every man you meet on your way. Be able to show Jesus Christ to everyone as a friend and comforter in all human misery, and as the transcendent Lord of history.

I accompany you with my prayer. Walk with trust towards the new millennium: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever!” (Heb 13:8).

You say you are adults, but you behave like young people. It is a good sign!

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