



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE
EUROPEAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATIONS**

Monday, 8 May 2000

Ladies and Gentlemen!

1. I cordially welcome each of you who come from the 51 member countries of the Union of European Football Associations and have gathered in Rome for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. Almost all the European nations are represented at today's meeting. In particular, the presence of the Federations from the East, which joined your Union after the fall of the Berlin Wall, shows even more the desire for peace and brotherhood which inspires your federations, as well as the commitment to expand horizons, to overcome every barrier and to create systematic communication among the various peoples, in order to make an effective contribution to the building of European unity.

I am therefore grateful for this visit, which allows me to appreciate the noble goals that inspire your service, which is meant to encourage a sport that can promote all the values of the human person. I greet Mr Luciano Nizzola, President of the Italian Football Federation, and thank him for his cordial words to me on behalf of those present.

2. In contemporary society football is a widespread sporting activity which involves a great number of people, and, in particular, young people. In this sport, apart from the possibility of healthy recreation, they also have an opportunity for physical development and athletic achievement, calling for sacrifice, constant commitment, respect for others, loyalty and solidarity.

Football is also a major mass phenomenon, involving many individuals and families, from stadium and television spectators to all those who work at various levels in the organization of sporting events, the training of sportsmen and the vast sector of the mass media.

This fact emphasizes the responsibility of those who look after the organization and promote the spread of this sporting activity at professional and amateur level. They are called never to lose sight of the significant educational possibilities which football, like other similar sporting disciplines, can develop.

In a special way, sportsmen, especially the more famous, should never forget that they in fact become models for the world of youth. It is therefore important that, apart from typically sporting skills, they also carefully develop human and spiritual qualities which will make them truly positive examples in the public mind. Furthermore, given the spread of this sport, it would be good if promoters, organizers at different levels and communications personnel engaged in concerted efforts to ensure that football never loses its genuine characteristic of being a sporting activity, and that it is not submerged by other concerns, especially economic ones.

3. Dear friends, you have come to Rome to celebrate the Great Jubilee. During the Holy Year the Church invites all believers and people of good will to consider their thoughts and actions, their expectations and hopes in the light of Christ, "the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22).

This implies a journey of genuine conversion, that is, the renouncement of the worldly mentality that wounds and degrades human dignity; it also implies the adherence with total trust and courageous commitment to the liberating way of thinking and acting taught by the Gospel. How can we not see the Jubilee as an invitation to make sports one more opportunity for the authentic promotion of the greatness and dignity of man? In this perspective, football structures are called to be a field of authentic humanity, where young people are encouraged to learn the great values of life and to spread everywhere the great virtues that are the basis of a worthy human society, such as tolerance, respect for human dignity, peace and brotherhood.

I am certain, dear friends who represent the European Federations, that you share my hopes, so that football will become more and more a place of tranquillity and that every match will achieve what sports must be: an overall development of the body, a sound spirit of competition, an education in the values of life, *joie de vivre*, fun and recreation.

4. May football, like every sport, become more and more the expression of the primacy of being over having, freeing itself - as your representative opportunely remarked just now - from everything that prevents it from being a positive occasion of solidarity and brotherhood, mutual respect and sincere encounter among the men and women of our world.

I also know of the recent efforts of your Federation which, with its own resources, has undertaken a praiseworthy initiative of assistance to poor countries and of special cooperation with Eastern European countries to spread football among young people and to introduce them to a healthy life

inspired by sound moral principles. May this be the constant style of all your programmes. Lastly, I ask you to convey my cordial sentiments to the sporting associations you represent, the athletes, all the personnel and their families.

I invoke God's Blessing upon you all.

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