



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CHILDREN
FROM CHERNOBYL AND THEIR HOSTS**

26 April 2001

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. With great affection I welcome you on this important anniversary, 15 years since the tragic accident which happened in the city of Chernobyl on 26 April 1986. I sincerely extend to each one of you a cordial greeting and a warm welcome.

My thoughts turn, in the first place, to the President of the Republic of Ukraine, Mr Leonid Kuchma, who wished to be present through his message, which was read a short time ago in this hall. I greet the Ambassador of the Republic of Ukraine to the Holy See, Her Excellency Mrs Nina Kovalska, and I thank her for the words which she has just addressed to me on everyone's behalf.

I then greet the authorities and the personages who by their presence wished to demonstrate the solidarity with the children of Chernobyl in the name of the communities and nations which they represent. I greet all those present, beginning with the representatives of the families, parishes, associations, movements and organizations that in these years have hosted and continue to welcome, to Italy, children affected by the consequences of what happened in Chernobyl.

With my journey to Ukraine approaching, I am more eager to embrace all the children of that nation, which is so dear to me, and to kiss that land so tried even by the nuclear disaster, the fatal effects of which are still felt today. With ardent hope I am also preparing to meet my brothers and sisters in the faith who live there, to be able to share with them the eagerness for a renewed evangelization.

2. At this moment we go back in thought to that 26 April 1986, when a tremendous explosion

occurred in the nuclear power station of Chernobyl in the dead of night. A few minutes later a huge toxic cloud covered the sky of the city and of Ukraine, spreading very far. The tragic results of so disastrous an event were not long in proving to be far worse than could have been imagined. It was not without reason that someone described it as the technological catastrophe of the century, which sadly rendered the city of Chernobyl world-famous. Since then it has become the symbol of the risks connected with the use of nuclear energy.

My appreciation goes to the civil administrations, the religious communities, the dioceses and those who, during these years, have worked tirelessly in order to help those who, through no fault of their own, have paid and continue to pay the price of a calamity of such magnitude.

Above all, I address, you, dear children of Chernobyl. You represent the thousands of your little friends, who have found hospitality in Italy to be healed and to overcome a difficult stage of their lives. The Pope embraces you and asks you to bring his greeting and his blessing to your families, your friends, peers and your school companions. To everyone!

Looking at you, I cannot but give thanks to God for the extraordinary generosity that, since then, has never ceased to alleviate the suffering and difficulties of those who continue to be innocent victims of the consequences of that huge catastrophe. How many Catholic institutions in various countries have opened their doors and opened their arms wide to those who were in need! How many can look with confidence towards the future as a result of this joint support, which today's event well emphasizes!

3. I would like, today, to voice all of your sentiments of gratitude for this chain of solidarity with regard to the victims of Chernobyl. This solidarity has been translated into gestures of concrete attention to brothers and sisters pressed by need. For Christians, this praiseworthy enterprise finds an authoritative foundation in the great commandment given by Jesus: "Love one another" (Jn 15: 17). Should not mutual love appear especially in times of trial? Even a famous popular proverb confirms this: "A friend in need is a friend indeed". When one is in need it is a great comfort to have trustworthy friends. It is important that this chain of goodness should never be broken. While it comforts those who are benefited, it spiritually enriches those who generously give their aid.

In the Gospel, Jesus assures believers: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25: 40). Love is the path by which the world can be improved. Loving everyone without distinction of race, language or religion becomes, in fact, a tangible sign of God's special love towards every human being, of whom he is Father.

4. Recalling the tragic effects caused by the accident of the nuclear reactor in Chernobyl, let us think of the future generations that these children represent. We must prepare a future of peace, free of fear and similar threats. This is a task for everyone. For this to happen, there must be a combined technical, scientific and human effort to put every kind of energy at the service of peace,

with respect for the needs of the human person and of nature. The future of the entire human race depends on this commitment.

While we pray for the numerous victims of Chernobyl and for those who bear on their bodies the signs of such a dreadful disaster, let us ask the Lord for light and support for those who, at various levels, are responsible for the destiny of mankind.

I also ask God in his omnipotence and mercy to grant comfort to those who suffer, and to see that what we sadly recall today may never happen again.

With these sentiments, I invoke the protection of Mary, Mother of Hope, and, while I renew to everyone my cordial greeting, I gladly impart to you a special Blessing.