



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL "COR UNUM"**

Thursday, 7 February 2002

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am happy to welcome you cordially on the occasion of the 24th Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum". I greet the President, Archbishop Paul Cordes, and thank him for his kind greeting on behalf of those present, beginning with the Secretary of the Council and including the other officials. I greet the Cardinals, Bishops, priests, religious and lay people from many nations who take part in the plenary meeting; some of them are newly appointed. I wish to thank each and every one of you for your availability and spirit of cooperation in such an important sector of ecclesial outreach.

Through the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum", the love of the Church reaches out to a great number of *poor and needy* throughout the world, making use of the various contributions and initiatives of local communities and international charities.

2. For your Plenary Assembly this year you have chosen to reflect on the theme of *volunteer work*, an important phenomenon that calls forth so much energy for good in the Church and in the world. It is a theme that has also been the centre of attention of the United Nations. Last year the UN reflected on volunteers and volunteer work.

In fact, volunteer work, the fruit of wise and deeply felt choices, offers to society, beyond the concrete act of service, *the witness to the value of unselfish giving*. This impelling value counters the trend of individualism unfortunately widespread in our societies, especially the prosperous

ones.

The action of volunteers aims at emphasizing *the centrality of the human person*, in contrast with the economic interests that often are the category that dominates social relationships. It is the person, who is always entitled to be served and loved, especially when he/she is ruined by evil and suffering, or when he/she is outcast and despised.

In this regard, volunteer work is *a significant humanizing and civilizing factor*. On the occasion of the International Day of Volunteers, last 5 December, to stress the concern of the Church for this vast phenomenon, I addressed a message to all who are involved in the field of service to human beings and to the common good. In my Message, I reaffirmed the validity of this experience that gives a great many people the possibility of *living concretely the vocation to love* innate in every human heart.

3. For Christians, *the root cause of this involvement* is to be found in Christ. It is through love that Jesus handed over his life to the brethren, and he did so without asking anything in return.

Believers follow his example. Thus engaged in various fields of humanitarian action, they can become for non-believers a true incentive to experience the depth of the Gospel message. They show in a concrete way that the Redeemer of man is present in the poor and suffering and wants to be recognized and loved in every human creature.

For this witness to be attractive, I hope that all who work in Catholic volunteer associations and institutions will take as their models so many saints of charity who with their lives left in the Church a wake of outstanding evangelical heroism. May each one be concerned personally to meet Christ who fills with love the hearts of those who want to serve their neighbour.

4. Your Plenary Assembly takes place a few months after the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum", created on 15 July 1971, by the Servant of God Paul VI.

Three decades have already gone by, in which the Church's charitable activity has grown and spread through the service of ecclesial organisms and the contribution of countless faithful. The results obtained confirm the validity of the intuition of my venerable Predecessor who, in accepting the guidelines issued by the Second Vatican Council, desired to establish within the Apostolic See an organism for coordinating and guiding the many institutions set up in the Church for the purpose of human promotion and Christian solidarity.

Today may the dioceses and Catholic organizations designated as charities find a place in your Pontifical Council for meetings, dialogue and orientation, so that they may intervene more effectively in the area and different faces of poverty.

5. In giving thanks to God for the 30 years of the activity of "Cor Unum", I feel the need to renew my gratitude for the promptness with which on many occasions, at times in sad and tragic events, it has been the intermediary of the Pope's charity. I especially wish to recall the recent activity dedicated to assisting the refugees from Afghanistan, as well as in other parts of the world, who have been devastated by war or natural disasters.

Dear brothers and sisters, I encourage you to continue in this work already successfully begun, with which you contribute a great deal to the promotion of human dignity and to the cause of peace.

Likewise, I hope that your daily work to inspire the charitable work of diocesan communities and to support Catholic volunteer workers may become an ever more attractive proclamation of the Gospel of hope and love.

With these wishes, as I entrust you all to the motherly protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as a pledge of spiritual favour and of every longed for good, I impart to each one a special Apostolic Blessing.