



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ITALIAN WOMEN'S CENTRE

Friday, 16 January 2004

Dear Sisters,

1. I am delighted to welcome you on the occasion of the National Congress of the Italian Women's Centre that is taking place in Rome in these days. I greet the national President and thank her for her kind words expressing the spiritual closeness to my pastoral ministry of the entire Association. I greet each one of you, dear delegates, who come from various Italian Provinces. Your presence gives me the pleasant opportunity to extend my thoughts to the women committed in various ways in your association, as well as to those you reach out to every day with your activities.

2. The Italian Women's Centre, inspired by Christian principles, tries to help women play their role in society with ever greater responsibility. Humanity feels more and more intensely the need to give meaning and purpose to a world in which new problems surface every day, giving rise to insecurity and confusion. Rightly, therefore, you are reflecting at your Congress on "Women facing the world's expectations". Our age, marked by rapidly changing events, has seen an increase in the participation of women in every context of civil, economic and religious life starting with the family, the first and vital cell of human society. This demands constant attention on your part to the problems that are emerging, as well as generous farsightedness in dealing with them.

3. In the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* I wanted to stress that "a woman's dignity is closely connected with the love which she receives by the very reason of her femininity; it is likewise connected with the love which she gives in return" (n. 30). It is important that women keep alive the awareness of their fundamental vocation: they can only find themselves by giving love to others with their special "genius" that ensures "sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance: because they are human!" (*ibid.*).

The biblical paradigm of woman, "placed" by the Creator beside man as "a fitting helper for him" (Gn 2: 18), also reveals the true meaning of her vocation. Her moral and spiritual strength stems

from an awareness that "God entrusts the human being to her in a special way" (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 30).

4. Dear friends, this is the principal mission of every woman also in the third millennium. Live it to the full and do not let yourselves be discouraged by the difficulties and obstacles you may encounter on your journey. On the contrary, ever confident in divine help, bring it to completion with joy, expressing the feminine "genius" that distinguishes you.

God will not let you go without the light and guidance of his Holy Spirit if you turn to him faithfully in prayer. The Virgin of Nazareth, a sublime example of femininity fulfilled, will be your unfailing support.

The Pope encourages you to witness everywhere to the Gospel of life and hope and accompanies you with daily remembrance to the Lord. With these sentiments, I willingly bless you, your families and all the members of the Italian Women's Centre.