



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE
OF ITALIAN CATHOLIC ACTION**

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 20 December 2013*

Dear Young People, Good morning!

I thank you for having come to bring me Christmas wishes on behalf of ACR and the entire Italian Catholic Action, which is represented here by the adult leaders who have accompanied you. I also express my best wishes to you all, to your families, and to the entire Association.

Catholic Action for Youth is a beautiful reality which has spread and is active in almost all of the diocese of Italy. I encourage you always to be “living stones” in the Church, to build up the Church, by being united to Jesus. Catholic Action without Jesus is pointless, it becomes an NGO, and there are many of these, it doesn’t work. It is something else to be living stones united to Jesus!

I heard that your journey this year was intended to help you to discover Jesus’ presence as a friend in your lives. The slogan says it well: “There is no game without you”. Behold, Christmas is the feast of the presence of God, who comes among us to save us. The birth of Jesus is no fable! It is an historic event which truly occurred in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. Faith enables us to recognize the Child born of the Virgin Mary, the true Son of God, who for love us us became man.

In the face of little Jesus we contemplate the face of God, who does not reveal himself in strength and power but in the weakness and frailty of a newborn babe. This is what our God is like, he comes so close, in a child. This Child reveals the faithfulness and tenderness of the unconditional love with which God surrounds each one of us. That is why we celebrate at Christmas, thus reliving what the shepherds at Bethlehem experienced. And we celebrate together with so many

fathers and mothers who struggle each day, facing so many sacrifices; we celebrate together with the little ones, the sick, the poor, for it is the celebration of God's encounter with us in Jesus.

Dear young people, Jesus loves you, he wants to be your friend; he wants to be a friend to all young people! Are you convinced of this? ... is that so? It seems you are not so convinced, no? Are you convinced or not? [The young people respond 'yes'.] Good! If you are convinced, surely you will be able to communicate the joy of this friendship everywhere: at home, in the parish, at school, with your friends ... And a question for you young people: I said "at home, in the parish, at school, with your friends". And with your enemies, with those who do not love you? What must we do? Who can tell me? What must we do? Make war? [A young man: pray for them!] That's it: pray for them! Be good to them so that they may become close to Jesus. This is what we should do: closeness, draw close. You will be able to bear witness by behaving as true Christians: ready to lend a hand to those in need. And if someone who does not love you needs something, will you give him a hand? You aren't sure? Yes! Yes! Without judging others, without speaking ill of them. People who speak ill of others are very unpleasant. Is gossip Christian or not? No! Is gossip prayer? Is gossip like praying or not? No! Gossiping is something bad. We must never do it. And we need to begin now: never gossip, never speak ill of others. Go forward in this way! So I wish you a blessed journey, always united to Jesus. I entrust you to Our Lady. I bless you together with your families, your teachers, your assistants and all the friends of Catholic Action for Youth. Merry Christmas, and pray for me! And now before receiving the blessing let us pray a *Hail Mary* to Our Lady.

Hail Mary