



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF
ITALIAN CATHOLIC ACTION***

Friday, 26 April 2002

Dear young people and adults of Catholic Action!

1. I am very pleased to welcome you to this special Audience on the occasion of your 11th National Assembly. Catholic Action and the Pope have a close relationship that has become stronger in time. In fact, from its beginning, your Association has had in the person and the teaching of the "*white Father*" (*bianco Padre*) an excellent source of guidance for its programmes and action. This bond can be described as a firm friendship, that takes shape in a few important meetings: every year at Christmas, the young people of ACR (Roman Catholic Action) come to greet me, every three years we meet on the occasion of the National Assembly, as we do this morning for the opening of the 11th National Assembly.

In a special way I greet Cardinal Camillo Ruini, President of the Italian Episcopal Conference, and the Bishops who have come with you, the National President, Mrs Paola Bignardi, the General Ecclesiastical Assistant, Bishop Francesco Lambiasi, and the other assistants and directors. I welcome each one of you taking part in the Assembly, and all your registered members.

On this occasion, first of all, I want to thank you for your love for the Church, which through faith you consider as your family. Thank you for your involvement in the ordinary life of the parish communities. I know that "you are there", even when your presence prefers discreet ways of interacting among the People of God in humble daily service.

May your ecclesial service never be reduced to mere activism, but be a concrete sign of the compassion with which the Lord draws near to the sufferings of the poor and asks each person to open his heart to the tragic situations of those in difficulty.

Continue to build bonds of communion and dialogue within the People of God: through the Pastoral Councils, and in your relations with priests and with other groups and movements. Your service will be much more appreciated when in a gentle and serene way you reveal the mature face of an active and informed laity.

For this end, it is important to shape true Christian consciences, through the direct formation of youth and adults, children, old people, families and teenagers. In this context, I want to address a word of special appreciation to all those who in Catholic Action take care of the educational mission, dedicated to accompanying others with teaching and listening, understanding and the support of encouragement and example. In the history of the young women's sector a motto was used: "the ideal is worth more than the life". May you who are in charge of formation especially work to show the younger ones the beauty of a life ready even now to be spent for the ideal that Christ proposes in the Gospel.

2. Allow me to take advantage of this happy occasion to entrust to you some thoughts that are close to my heart.

First of all, I would like to tell you that *the Church needs Catholic Action*. The Church needs a group of laity who, faithful to their vocation and in union with their legitimate Pastors, are ready to share, together with them, the daily labour of evangelization in every milieu.

As your Bishops recently wrote to you, "the direct and fundamental tie of Catholic Action with the diocese and its Bishop, the undertaking of the Church's mission, being "dedicated" to the Church herself and the global nature of her mission, all of this makes Catholic Action not one ecclesial group among others, but a gift of God and a resource for the increase of ecclesial communion" (*Letter of the Permanent Council of the Italian Episcopal Conference to the National Presidency of Italian Catholic Action, 12 March 2002*).

The Church needs Catholic Action because she needs laity ready to dedicate themselves to the apostolate and to establish, especially with the diocesan Community, a bond that gives a profound imprint to their life and their spiritual journey. She needs laity whose experience shows, in a concrete and daily way, the great joy of the Christian life; laity who recognize in Baptism the root of their dignity, in the Christian Community the family with which they share their faith, and in the Pastor the father who guides and supports the journey of the brethren; laity who do not reduce faith to a private act, and do not hesitate to bring the leaven of the Gospel to the fabric of human relations, to the institutions, the region, and the new realm of globalization in order to build a civilization of love.

3. It is because the Church needs a *living, strong, and beautiful Catholic Action*, I am pleased to repeat to each one of you: *Duc in altum!*

Duc in altum, Catholic Action! Have the courage of the future. May your history, marked by the shining example of Saints and Blesseds, shine today as well for fidelity to the Church with that freedom of those who allow themselves to be guided by the breath of the Spirit and forcefully tend toward the great ideals.

Duc in altum! Be a prophetic presence in the world, promoting those aspects of life that are often forgotten and therefore ever more urgent, such as interiority, silence, responsibility, education, gratuitous help, service, sobriety, fraternity, hope in tomorrow and love for life. Work effectively in order that today's society may recover the true sense of man and his dignity, the value of life and the family, of peace and solidarity, of justice and mercy.

Duc in altum! Have the humble boldness to fix your gaze upon Jesus to make your authentic renewal come from him. It will thus be easier for you to distinguish what is necessary from what is the fruit of time, and you will experience the longed-for renewal as a gift of the Spirit, enabling you to travel even through the arduous paths of the desert and purification to reach the beauty of a new life, which God unceasingly gives to those who entrust themselves to Him.

Catholic Action, do not be afraid! You belong to the Church and are in the heart of the Lord, who guides your steps unceasingly towards the unlimited and unsurpassed newness of the Gospel. Know that the Pope supports and is with you in prayer since you make up this wonderful Association and as he invites you to persevere in your commitments, he is happy to bless you.