



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF ITALIAN COMMUNES (ANCI)**

Monday, 26 April 2004

Your Eminence,

Distinguished Representatives of the National Association of Italian Communes,

1. I have the pleasure of extending a cordial welcome to you at this meeting, being held during the celebrations for the centenary of the birth of Professor Giorgio La Pira. I greet each one of you and the cities that you represent. I greet especially Cardinal Ennio Antonelli, Archbishop of Florence, together with Mr Leonardo Domenici, the Mayor of this city and President of ANCI. I thank him for the words he has addressed to me with reference to the service Giorgio La Pira rendered to the cause of fraternal co-existence between nations. In this regard, I admired your Association's decision, in order to keep alive the memory of his efforts to encourage friendship between peoples that have their roots in Abraham - Jews, Christians and Muslims - to offer concrete aid to the *Caritas Baby Hospital* in Bethlehem.

2. I express to you my heartfelt appreciation for this generous gesture in honour of the memory of Giorgio La Pira, an eminent figure in politics, culture and spirituality of the last century. Before potentates he firmly expressed his ideas as a believer and lover of peace, inviting his interlocutors to join forces to promote this basic good in the various sectors: in society, politics, economics, culture and between religions.

In political theory and practice, Prof. La Pira sensed the need to apply Gospel methodology, drawing inspiration from the commandment of love and forgiveness. The "*Conventions for Peace and Christian Civilization*", which he promoted in Florence from 1952 to 1956 in order to encourage friendship between Christians, Jews and Muslims, remain emblematic.

3. In a letter to his friend Amintore Fanfani, he wrote words that are surprisingly relevant today: "Politicians are civil leaders entrusted by the Lord, through the changing 'methods' of the times, with the duty to lead humanity toward peace and unity, and [to work for] the spiritual and social betterment of each person and of all peoples together" (22 October 1964).

Prof. La Pira's experience as a politician and believer was exceptional as he united contemplation and prayer to social and administrative work, giving special preference to the poor and suffering.

Dear Mayors, may his shining witness inspire your daily choices and actions! Following the example of Giorgio La Pira, place yourselves generously at the service of your communities, giving special attention to the young people in all the age-groups, promoting their spiritual growth. Do not fail to cultivate those human and Christian values that make up the rich patrimony of European ideals, which has given life to a civilization that over the centuries has favoured the development of authentically democratic societies. Without ethical foundations, democracy risks deteriorating with time and even to disappear.

Thanks to the contribution of all, the dream of a better world can become a reality. May God allow humanity to see this prophesy of peace fulfilled!

I join this hope with prayer, as I cordially bless you all.