The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO ITALIAN CATHOLIC ACTION

Saint Peter's Square
Sunday, 30 April 2017

[Multimedia]

Dear Friends from Catholic Action, good morning!

I am very happy to be with you, who have come in such large numbers to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the establishment of your Association. I greet you all with affection, beginning with your General Assistant and the National President, whom I thank for their words of introduction to our meeting. Italian Catholic Action was born of the dream of two young men, Mario Fani and Giovanni Acquaderni. With the passage of time, it became a journey of faith for many generations and a summons to holiness for countless persons. Children, young people and adults became disciples of Jesus and tried to live as joyful witnesses of his love in the world. For me too, it is familiar territory: both my father and my grandmother belonged to Catholic Action!

Yours is a beautiful and important story, for which you have many reasons to thank the Lord and for which the Church is grateful to you. It is the story of a group of people – men and women of all ages and conditions, young and old, laity and clergy – who sought a shared experience of encountering the Lord, without regard for differences of social position, cultural background and places of origin. Lay faithful who together sought ways to proclaim by their lives the beauty of God's love and to contribute, with their personal efforts and competence, to the building of a more just, fraternal and supportive society. It is a story of passion for the world and for the Church – I thought of this when I told you about a book written in Argentina in 1937 entitled *Catholic Action and Catholic Passion*. Yours is a story that shaped distinguished men and women of exemplary faith, who have served the nation with generosity and courage.

This impressive history should not tempt you to keep looking back, or in the mirror, or resting

comfortably in an armchair! Keep this in mind: don't keep looking over your shoulder, because you will trip and fall! Don't keep looking at yourself in a mirror: so many of us are unsightly, so it is better not even to look! And don't rest in an armchair: it will make you put on weight and that won't help your cholesterol! Looking back on life's long journey helps you realize that you are a people who walk together, caring for one another, helping one another to grow humanly and in faith, sharing with others the mercy with which the Lord caresses us. I encourage you to continue being a band of missionary disciples who experience and testify to the joy of knowing that the Lord loves us with infinite love, and who, together with him, profoundly love the times in which we live. This is the lesson taught by the great witnesses of holiness who were the trailblazers of your association. Among them, I would recall Giuseppe Toniolo, Armida Barelli, Piergiorgio Frassati, Antonietta Meo, Teresio Olivelli and Vittorio Bachelet. Catholic Action, live up to your history! Live up to these women and men who have gone before you.

Over these hundred and fifty years, Catholic Action has always been distinguished by great love for Jesus and the Church. Today too, you are called to pursue your particular vocation by placing yourselves at the service of the dioceses, always in union with their Bishops, and in the parishes where the Church lives among the people, always. The entire People of God benefits from the fruits of your commitment, carried out in harmony between the universal Church and the particular Church. It is in the specifically lay vocation to a holiness lived out in daily life that you will find the strength and the courage to live your faith, wherever you are, making hospitality and dialogue the style by which you become neighbours to one another and experience the beauty of a shared responsibility. Never weary of pursuing avenues that encourage the style of authentic synodality, a way of being God's people where everyone is able to contribute to an attentive, reflective and prayerful reading of the signs of the times. In this way, you will come to know and to do God's will, in the conviction that the Holy Spirit is daily at work, renewing all things.

I encourage you to carry out your apostolic experience while remaining rooted in your parish, "which is not an outdated institution" – you know that, don't you? The parish is not an outdated institution, because "it is the presence of a Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 28).

The parish is the place where people can feel welcomed just as they are, to be helped to grow humanly and spiritually, in faith and in love for God's creation and for their brothers and sisters. But this can only happen if the parish is not caught up in itself, and Catholic Action, present in the parish, is not caught up in itself either. Catholic Action should ensure that the parish remains "in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few" (*ibid.*). Please, don't let that happen!

Dear members of Catholic Action, may all your initiatives, plans and projects be a missionary

experience, directed to evangelization and not to self-preservation. Your relationship to the diocese and the parish should find concrete expression in the streets of your cities, towns and neighbourhoods. As in the past hundred and fifty years, continue to feel a great sense of responsibility for sowing the good seed of the Gospel in the life of the world, through your charitable work, through your involvement in political life – but please, politics in the noblest sense of the world, politics with a capital P! But also through your strong commitment to education and your engagement in the cultural sphere. Expand your own hearts in order to expand the heart of your parishes. Take your faith to the streets, meet everyone, welcome everyone, listen to everyone, embrace everyone. Every life is a life loved by the Lord, and every face shows us the face of Christ, especially the faces of the poor, the hurting, those who feel abandoned, those fleeing death who seek refuge in our homes and towns. “None of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice” (*ibid.*, 201).

Remain open to the world around you. Engage readily in dialogue with your neighbours, even those who may have other ideas than your own, yet long, like you, for peace, justice and fraternity. It is in dialogue that we can shape a shared future. Through dialogue, we build peace, caring for all and entering into dialogue with all.

Dear children, young people and adults of Catholic Action: go forth, reach out to every periphery! Go forth and be Church there, with the strength of the Holy Spirit!

May the maternal protection of the Immaculate Virgin sustain you, and may the encouragement and the esteem of your Bishops accompany you. With great affection, I impart my Blessing to you and to all the Association. And please, remember to pray for me!

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