



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO THE ITALIAN "ALPINI" *Saturday, 19 May 1979 Beloved Members of the Alpine Troops of*

Italy Welcome to this historic Square of St Peter's! Celebrating your periodical Parade, pregnant with memories, nostalgia, poetry and friendship, in Rome this year, you also wished to meet the Pope. Alpine soldiers of Italy! Veterans, survivors of so many battles, wounded, perhaps, and mutilated, rank and file, military Chaplains, decorated and well-deserving, young servicemen who belong to this generous and courageous corps, receive my most cordial greeting. I thank you heartily for coming! I thank you in particular for your feelings of faith, esteem, goodwill and respect, and I would like everyone to feel in the depths of his heart how much the Church and the Pope love you; they love every man as he makes his pilgrim way on earth! May today's meeting become for you all a joyful page of your life, may it be a comfort and spur for you and for your dear ones to be better and better. But I would like you to take with you, besides the spontaneous and warm joy of the meeting, also the memory of the word of the Pope, who speaks to you in the name of Christ, man's Redeemer. 1. You men, steeled by the dramatic and painful vicissitudes of history, teach the world to see in events the hand of divine Providence guiding history. The international situation, always precarious and unstable, the continual resurgence of political and social violence, the widespread sense of dissatisfaction and restlessness, the heavy concerns for the future of mankind, the bitter disappointments of many classes of society, the uncertainties that weigh on the future of everyone, and still other causes, can introduce the poison of pessimism and drive to escapism, indifference, sometimes to heedless and inert irony, and in certain cases even to despair! Well, the difficult and glorious events of your lives teach people to have the courage to accept history. Fundamentally, this means loving one's own times, without vain regrets and without mythical utopias, convinced that each one has a mission to carry out, that life is a gift received and riches that must be bestowed, whether the times are serene or intricate, peaceful or troubled. For this, however, the "pedagogy of will" is necessary. That is, training for sacrifice and self-denial, commitment in the formation of strong, serious characters, education to the virtue of inner fortitude to overcome difficulties, not to give in to laziness, to keep one's word and do one's duty faithfully. Today particularly, the world needs tenacious and courageous men who look upwards, like the mountaineer who climbs the steep wall to reach the summit and neither the abyss of the precipice below nor the hard rock or inclement ice can stop him. Today many people feel frail and confused; and it is also understandable, in view of the more concrete and immediate knowledge of human vicissitudes and the facile consumer mentality that progress has created. It is, therefore, all

the more necessary to return and teach the spirit of sacrifice and courage.² But it is not enough to accept history: you teach us that it is necessary to "transform" history! How many of you could narrate their adventures in peace and in war, now tragic and sad, now merry and serene! And what can be drawn from this patrimony of real-life experience? Only one conclusion and only one imperative: history must be transformed by means of the "civilization of love" which was the constant concern of Pope Paul VI, of venerated and ever present memory. And therefore, I say to you, members of the Italian Alpine troops, as I say to all men on earth: Love! This is Christ's "new commandment": "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12);— love your family, your home, and remain faithful in love!— love your country, your district, your city! Let each one make his contribution of commitment, service, and charity, especially for the suffering and needy, so as to create centres of solidarity, in order that no one will feel alone and excluded because of selfishness.— love Italy, your dear homeland, which amid so many difficulties and conflicts, is still your country, rich in history, beauty, genius and goodness!— love Europe, which for millennia has poured into history the incalculable riches of intelligence and feeling.— love the whole world, because we are all brothers and each one must bear the whole of humanity in his heart! How many refugees, unemployed, victims of catastrophes, homeless and starving people are waiting for our love! Let us recall a well-known figure in Italy and abroad: the Alpine Chaplain, Don Carlo Gnocchi! On his return from the terrible experience of the campaign in Russia, he committed himself to loving even more, and founded the Society for the assistance of maimed children and victims of polio!³ Finally, I would like to add further: let us elevate history by means of faith in Jesus Christ! For what reason did God become incarnate? Why did Jesus Christ, the Word of God, wish to take his place in our human history? Only to save it, by revealing the transcendent and ultramundane values of all our actions. This is the truth that makes our existence so sublime: we are destined for God, for eternity, for eternal happiness which depends on our free choices. Jesus came to bear witness to truth and to guarantee it (Jn 18:37). In the introduction to his famous "Life of Jesus", the well-known French writer François Mauriac wrote: "It was necessary for God to immerse himself in humanity and, at a precise moment of history, at a determined point of the globe, for a human being, made of flesh and blood, to utter certain words, carry out certain acts, in order that I should throw myself on my knees... I believe only in what I touch, only in what I see, only in what is incorporated in my substance; and that is why I have faith in Christ" (F. Mauriac, *La vita di Gesù*, Ed. Mondadori, Milan, 1943). To save man it is necessary to have faith in Christ! To elevate history, it is necessary to save men! And Christ says to us: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). He alone has words of eternal life! He alone is man's salvation. Members of the Alpine troops of Italy! Christ wants to make you, too, instruments of peace and salvation! Listen to his voice! Bear witness to his love! May the Blessed Virgin, whom you call "Our Lady of the Alpine troops", assist you! Let my propitiating Blessing, which I wish to extend to all your dear ones, to all your families, accompany you! © Copyright 1979 -

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