



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE ITALIAN CATHOLIC SCOUTS
AND GUIDES ASSOCIATION**

2 August 1997

*To my Venerable Brother Bishop Arrigo Miglio of Iglesias, Italy
General Chaplain of the AGESCI*

1. The "National Route of the Leadership Communities" of this association is about to take place; it will reach its climax in the great "camp" at Piani di Verteglia, in the province of Avellino, where about 12,000 Italian scoutmasters will meet to reflect on the theme "*Ways and thoughts for the future*".

I sincerely thank you and those in charge of the AGESCI for inviting me to this important gathering which takes my mind back to the joyful meeting I had with the "rovers" and the "sentries" who were taking part in the National Route at Piani di Pezza on 9 August 1986. Recalling those moments of great youthful enthusiasm and fervent Gospel witness, and unfortunately not being able to come in person this time, I would like to send a special Message for the occasion to you and to all those taking part.

2. Dear scoutmasters of the AGESCI, I greet you with words you know well and which we have exchanged on many occasions when I have met you during my visits to the parishes of Rome and to the Italian Dioceses: *Have a good journey!*

I thank the Lord for the scout route you have taken and for the commitment and perseverance that you show today as teachers: you are valuable collaborators for the Church and for all of Italian society in the educational mission to the children and young people entrusted to you.

The National Route you are undertaking has seen you as "pilgrims" through the country's regions, like a chain linked together in a common commitment of solidarity to the younger generations. Now it sees you gathered together in a "city" of tents, an effective image of the condition of believers on their way to "the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb 11:10). For each of you and for your whole association, this is an extraordinary opportunity of encouragement and examination for an ever better determination of the distinctive elements of your presence and commitment in the Church and in society, for directing your path and that of the young people entrusted to you towards horizons of hope and renewed trust in the beauty of life and service, for helping each other to overcome the difficulties you meet as teachers, by drawing on the rich, long tradition of Catholic scouting you have inherited.

3. You began your journey after listening to the many "calls" that come to you from various directions: from children and their families, from young people, from society, from the particular Churches. You are aware of all these challenges in carrying out your educational service, which first demands of you a journey of spiritual and human growth in order to be *credible witnesses* to the values you propose. We are all quite convinced that — as my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, said — the world today has greater need of witnesses than of teachers (cf. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 41): therefore on your *Route* you turned your gaze first of all to the one Teacher, Jesus Christ, by daily listening to his Word and searching for the reflection of his face in those who live his teaching faithfully and are therefore worthy to be called teachers: men and women whom the Lord has us meet as witnesses along our way. "Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses", keep "looking" to him, Jesus, the Teacher, so as not to grow weary or faint-hearted (cf. Heb 12: 1-3), but to learn from him to recognize the true teachers from the false, the teachers of life from the teachers of death.

As teacher, a scoutmaster must constantly know how to discern, to be vigilant. "*Estote parati*" is your motto. Like a sentry, you must know how to scan the horizon to discern in time the ever new frontiers towards which the Spirit of the Lord calls you. What example of a man and woman, of a married couple and family, is a teacher called to present? In concrete terms, what does it mean to commit oneself concretely to a world of greater justice and solidarity? How can one succeed in living harmoniously in a complex and diversified society, and not lose the Gospel capacity to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world?

You are more and more frequently approached by children and young people who come from families and backgrounds that are far from the Christian life, or who belong to other religious faiths, but are attracted by the beauty and wisdom of the scout method, open as it is to love for nature and human values, imbued with piety and faith in God, successful in teaching responsibility and freedom. This is an important challenge, which asks you to reconcile the clarity and completeness of presenting the Gospel life with the capacity for a dialogue that respects the diversity of cultures and personal experiences which are interwoven in Italy today.

4. You can face these challenges with confidence and meet them, by starting precisely from the *experience of the Catholic scouting tradition* of the two associations that preceded you, ASCI and AGI and what your Association, AGESCI, has been pursuing for over 20 years. The encounter of scouting with the Catholic faith did not relegate to the background, but enhanced and stressed even more the beauty and importance of the human values that characterize its educational method, rich in harmony and points of contact with Gospel values and the foundations of an anthropology that respects the plan of God the Creator and the dignity and basic rights of the human person.

Dear scoutmasters of AGESCI, let yourselves be guided by him who is the only true Teacher, a loving and demanding Teacher. Do not be afraid to *present all his teaching*, difficult but never disappointing, just as you should never be afraid to ask your young people to face difficult tasks, those that make it possible to reach the mountain peaks and to discover the springs of joy and the meaning of life.

Your founder, Baden Powell, loved to point out *the two great books* that you must always know how to read: the book of *nature* and the book of the *Word of God*, the Bible. This is reliable and fruitful advice. By loving nature, living in it and respecting it, you learn to join your voice to the thousand voices of the woods that praise the Lord; immersed in nature, you continue to celebrate your moments of prayer and your liturgies, which will linger in the hearts of the young as unforgettable experiences. By cultivating your tradition of love and study of the Bible, you will always find new paths and ways for an original and effective catechesis, as part of the Italian Church's catechesis and marked by the wealth of symbols and occasions that are valuable to scouting, according to the particular guidelines of your "Unified Plan of Catechesis" and the "Path of Faith", aids that you have taken care to prepare during these years for the formation of your young people, for which you, scoutmasters, are jointly responsible.

5. Dear heads of the AGESCI, I would sincerely have liked to be among you, in the marvellous natural surroundings of Piani di Verteglia, but circumstances have prevented me. I hope to meet some of you in Paris for the World Youth Day, where the scouts can share with so many others the "paths and thoughts for tomorrow", a tomorrow of hope and peace, in the new millennium which will also see you and the young people entrusted to you play a leading role.

May you always be accompanied by Mary, Our Lady of the Scouts, who fully believed in the Word of God and willingly set out to offer her service.

Dear Brother, to you and to all the priests involved in the AGESCI, and to all you scoutmasters and to your young people, I affectionately send a special Apostolic Blessing.

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