



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO PILGRIMS FROM SIENA**

Saturday, 15 March 1997

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I welcome all of you who have come here to repay the visit which I had the joy of making to Colle di Val d'Elsa and Siena on 30 March last year. I greet you affectionately, and first of all I respectfully acknowledge my dear brothers in the Episcopate, Archbishop Gaetano Bonicelli and Bishop Alberto Giglioli of the Dioceses of Siena-Colle di Val d'Elsa-Montalcino and of Montepulciano, respectively.

I also greet the priests and religious who work among you and who have accompanied you here today. Lastly, I greet all of you who by your visit renew in my heart the feelings I experienced in your land a year ago.

2. We are meeting here today *shortly before the feast of St Joseph* and this reminds me of my visit to the workers of Colle di Val d'Elsa and the problems I spoke of then. I would also like to confirm the Church's closeness to the working world. After the example of her Founder and Teacher, the Church wishes to be present among workers, to offer them the Gospel message about work and the central place that man must always occupy in economic relations.

The memory of Siena cannot fail to call to mind the figure of the great saint, now also a doctor of the Church, who was born in your land. *The message of St Catherine* is still valid and inspiring. The many problems she had to face in her time are not unlike those of today. With the strength and freedom that came from her intimate union with God, in a tumultuous era she was able to call on both great and small to build relationships of justice and peace in all walks of life. How can we not hope that Catherine's teaching — that of a woman exemplary in combining contemplation with action — may continue to influence the culture and life of the Italian nation of which she is the patroness, and of the city and province of Siena in particular? May the 650th anniversary of her

birth (25 March 1347), which occurs at this time, once again turn the attention of the Sienese and of all Italians to the rich patrimony of her teaching.

3. When I came to Siena last year, I wished symbolically to conclude the *National Eucharistic Congress*, held two years before. I am pleased to learn that that solemn celebration remains a point of reference for your community. Indeed, what can be more unifying and attractive than the Eucharistic Mystery believed, loved and celebrated? *The Eucharist speaks of self-giving love*: it is the greatest expression of Christ's love for us, and, at the same time, of our love for Christ. Let us fix our gaze on him in this first year of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. We must make room for Christ in our personal and community lives. Your ancestors established many popular traditions, feasts, companies and confraternities linked to Eucharistic devotion. Many of these are far from having lost their impact and should be encouraged through wise and appropriate modernization. Indeed, it is not enough to preserve the past, no matter how wonderful it might be; we must constantly revive it in order to transmit its values intact to the new generations.

The monogram of Christ brought by the great St Bernardine as a sign of peace stands out on the town hall of Siena and on almost all the houses in your land: *Jesus, true God and true man, the Saviour*. May it not be a mere archaeological piece! Christ is always the same yesterday, today and for ever. Make room for Christ in your personal, family, social and professional lives. His presence is a guarantee of richer and more authentic human relationships.

4. Certainly the most important dimension of your pilgrimage today is that of the future, the Jubilee of the Year 2000. For more than 1,000 years the *land of Siena has been traversed by the most classical approaches to Rome*: the *Via Francigena*, which connected various routes of Northern Europe with Rome, and the *Via Romaea*, which from Eastern Europe joined the former at Poggibonsi. Along these roads places for prayer, rest and care offering hospitality to pilgrims abounded: glorious abbeys, mansions, shelters, castles and immense buildings such as the Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, which stands in your city.

In it we find a true witness to the Christian spirit of art and humanity: the *Pellegrinaio*, a large hall frescoed by the most famous artists of the time, where pilgrims were welcomed, refreshed and cared for like brothers and sisters. In that solemn and dignified atmosphere, St Catherine and St Bernardine developed forms of Christian volunteer work which, thank God, are still flourishing today. We need only recall with gratitude the *Misericordias*, which in Tuscany found and continue to play an invaluable role, together with similar institutions in the field of social assistance and health care.

5. Dear brothers and sisters, I hope that your visit to St Peter's tomb and your meeting with his Successor *will confirm your faith* and your identity as persons baptized in Christ. Born to new life by Baptism, may you be *signs of hope* in a society that is in many respects disoriented.

In the light of Easter, which is now approaching, I hope your pilgrimage will yield abundant fruit and I ask you to convey my greetings to those who were unable to take part, especially the sick.

With these sentiments I invoke upon you the protection of Mary most holy, and I sincerely impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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