



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF CATHOLIC ACTION**

Saturday, 18 October 1997

Dear Young People of Italian Catholic Action,

1. Welcome to St Peter's Square!

You have wanted to visit the Pope at the end of your national convention. Thank you for coming: you bring joy and enthusiasm.

I have come among you to greet you and to bless you all. I know that you come from all over Italy: I also send a greeting to your relatives, who are with us in spirit at this moment.

I particularly thank your National President, Mr Giuseppe Gervasio, the General Chaplain, Archbishop Agostino Superbo, and the National Director and Assistant of Catholic Action Youth. They have organized this happy event and, together with your two representatives, have wished to express to me the sentiments of you all.

I greet your teachers, who generously contribute to the human and Christian, ecclesial and missionary growth of the children and young people given to the Church by divine Providence through the apostolic experience of the ACR. I greet the chaplains and women religious present, the teachers of Gospel life in the guidance of both children and educators on the way of faith. I also address a cordial greeting to Minister Rosi Bindi, to the Mayor of Rome and to the President of the Lazio Region, and thank them for coming.

2. Dear young people, you are keeping this appointment, long awaited and prepared for, under the festive and joyful banner: "*There is more fun together*". This is the motto you have adopted and it

aptly summarizes the message of your national meeting. You visibly express in it the journey of the whole Church towards the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and, in a certain way, you anticipate an important aspect of it by telling everyone that celebrations are only authentic if they are experienced "together".

We are referring to the *Christian celebration* which always arises from a personal encounter with Christ Jesus, welcomed into the Church's concrete experience as friend and Lord. You do this in your groups and in your parishes.

It is he, the Lord Jesus, who fills the heart with joy, with his full and lasting joy, and thus makes it possible to celebrate in brotherhood and solidarity with others.

In following Jesus, the one true Saviour of the world, you young people are invited to grow in knowledge and love of the heavenly Father, and to perform *concrete acts of love and hope* in the course of everyday life. Thus your commitment to making peace possible will continue, starting in the places where you spend your days: home, school, the parish, the town, the city, Italy.

Your commitment to peace then spreads to your peers who are living in less favourable situations in other nations of Europe and the world. I am thinking, for example, of Sarajevo and of the very beautiful bridge of friendship you have built with the young people of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In an ever more intense friendship with Jesus Christ you are increasing the Church's communion; with your talents and according to your valuable abilities, you are putting yourselves at the service of Christian communities so that they may be ever more faithful to the Gospel.

3. Young people of Italian Catholic Action, the Pope has confidence in you! This is why he does not hesitate to suggest that you follow Jesus by imitating the example of the saints. Today the Church is celebrating the liturgical feast of St Luke the Evangelist. You are certainly very familiar with his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Meditate deeply on God's Word, in private and together. It will help you to understand your vocation ever better and to become fearless witnesses to Jesus.

A few days ago, we commemorated St Francis of Assisi, patron of Italy and of Italian Catholic Action. What a teacher of the evangelical life, what a sound model of an apostle of Christ is this great saint, who is known and venerated all over the world!

In addition to him, who gave up everything for love of the Lord, I would like today to present another saint to you, who died when she was only 24, exactly 100 years ago: St *Thérèse of the Child Jesus*, who tomorrow I shall proclaim a doctor of the Church. Little Thérèse would of course have been an excellent member of the ACR, at least before entering Carmel! She was full of vitality, faith and enthusiasm for Jesus and the Gospel. She wanted to belong completely to God,

and chose to become a Carmelite nun. Her short life was totally consumed by love of God and by the desire to make him loved by the whole world. Thérèse has bequeathed to us as her testament the simple and secure way of love filled with trust in God. She called it the "little way", because it is open to those who, as Jesus says, can become "little", that is, humble and simple. In fact it is the way of trustful abandonment into God's hands, relying more on him than on one's own strength. Young people, develop your personality and become strong and mature, but do so in a way that your heart remains humble, pure and "little" before God, ever ready to love your brothers and sisters: only in this way does one enter the kingdom of heaven, where the greatest is the one who is smallest, and the most important is the servant of all.

4. I would now like to ask you to *express publicly* and to repeat together, in unison, the pledges to the Christian life and mission which you make every year as members of the ACR.

Dear young people, you know you have become, by Baptism, children of God and living stones of the Church:

— Do you want to foster intimacy and friendship with Jesus Christ in prayer and in the sacramental life?

(The young people say: Yes!)

You know you are called by the Lord Jesus to become apostles of joy and builders of hope in the Christian community:

— Do you want to make your own contribution, individually and as a group, to building up the Church in the communities to which you belong?

(The young people say: Yes!)

You know you are called, even at your young age, to be generous witnesses to the newness of Christianity:

— Do you want your peers, your friends, your families, your towns and cities to be touched by the joy of the Gospel and the love of Christ?

(The young people say: Yes!)

5. Dear young people, may the Holy Spirit, gift of the heavenly Father and of Christ his Son, help you to remain faithful to these commitments and to grow in the joy of Christian friendship, allowing the Lord to work great things in you. He also wants to make you a gift to the Church and to all humanity.

This is why I entrust you to Mary, the gentle young girl of Nazareth, the Mother of the Lord and of us all, that she may watch each day over your progress on the paths of truth and peace.

Together with Christ, with Mary, with the saints and with the ACR, *there really is more fun!*

A special blessing to all of you and to your families.

Dear young people, you have filled St Peter's Square as it seldom is. I thank you and hope you have a nice Sunday.

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