



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PILGRIMS DEVOTED TO ST RITA OF CASCIA
ON THE CENTENARY OF HER CANONIZATION**

Saturday, 20 May 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. I am pleased to offer you a cordial welcome and to express to you my joy at the special event which has brought us together here. You have come in large numbers to make your pilgrimage to Rome and to pass through the Holy Door of the Great Jubilee. I greet Cardinal Sodano, Secretary of State. I greet dear Archbishop Riccardo Fontana of Spoleto-Norcia and thank him for the words and good wishes he addressed to me on your behalf. I greet Cardinal Opilio Rossi, the Armenian Patriarch and all the Bishops present. I greet the Fathers General, the religious and nuns of the Order of St Augustine, as well as the authorities of every order and rank. Your presence reminds me of the visit I made 20 years ago to the town of Cascia to visit the people struck by the earthquake of 1979.

Among us today is an illustrious pilgrim who joins us from heaven in our prayer. It is St Rita of Cascia, whose mortal remains, brought to Rome by the Italian Police, accompany the crowds of those who devotedly call upon her with affectionate familiarity and confidently bring to her the problems and anxieties that weigh upon their hearts.

Today it is as if the shrine of Cascia had been moved to St Peter's Square. And you have come to venerate her, dear pilgrims, from every part of the world. Together with her you intend to renew your deepest sentiments of fidelity and communion to the Pope, as she did in her lifetime.

The mortal remains of St Rita, which we venerate here today, are a significant sign of what the Lord accomplishes in history when he finds humble hearts open to his love. Here we see the frail body of a woman who was small in stature but great in holiness, who lived in humility and is now known throughout the world for her heroic Christian life as a wife, mother, widow and nun. Deeply rooted in the love of Christ, Rita found in her faith unshakeable strength to be a woman of peace in

every situation.

In her example of total abandonment to God, in her transparent simplicity and in her unflinching fidelity to the Gospel, we too can find sound direction for being authentic Christian witnesses at the dawn of the third millennium.

2. But what is the message that this saint passes on to us? It is a message that flows from her life: humility and obedience were the path that Rita took to be ever more perfectly conformed to the Crucified One. The mark which shines on her forehead is the verification of her Christian maturity. On the Cross with Jesus, she is crowned in a certain way with the love that she knew and heroically expressed within her home and by her participation in the events of her town.

Following the spirituality of St Augustine, she became a disciple of the Crucified One and an "expert in suffering"; she learned to understand the sorrows of the human heart. Rita thus became the advocate of the poor and the despairing, obtaining countless graces of consolation and comfort for those who called upon her in the most varied situations.

Rita of Cascia was the first woman to be canonized in the Great Jubilee at the beginning of the 20th century, 24 May 1900. In decreeing her sainthood, my predecessor Leo XIII observed that she pleased Christ so much that he chose to imprint upon her the seal of his charity and his passion. This privilege was granted to her for her exceptional humility, her interior detachment from earthly desires and the admirable penitential spirit which accompanied her at every moment of her life (cf. Apostolic Letter *Umbria gloriosa sanctorum parens*, Acta Leonis XX, pp. 152-153).

3. Today, 100 years after her canonization, I am pleased to offer her again as a sign of hope, especially to families. Dear Christian families, by imitating her example, may you also know how to find in your fidelity to Christ the strength to fulfil your mission of service to the civilization of love!

If we ask St Rita for the secret to this extraordinary work of social and spiritual renewal, she replies: *fidelity to the Love that was crucified*. Rita, with Christ and like Christ, goes to the Cross always and only through love. Like her, then, let us turn our eyes and hearts to Jesus, who died on the Cross and rose for our salvation. It is he, our Redeemer, who makes the family's mission of unity and fidelity possible, as he did for this beloved saint, even in moments of crisis and difficulty. And it is he who gives concrete form to the Christian commitment to building peace by helping them to overcome the conflicts and tensions which unfortunately are so frequent in daily life.

4. The saint of Cascia belongs to the great host of Christian women who "have had a significant impact on the life of the Church as well as of society" (Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, n. 27). Rita well interpreted the "feminine genius" by living it intensely in both physical and spiritual motherhood.

On the sixth centenary of her birth I recalled that her lesson "is concentrated on these typical elements of spirituality: the offer of forgiveness and the acceptance of suffering, not through a form of passive resignation ... but through the strength of that love for Christ who, precisely in the episode of his being crowned, suffered, along with other humiliations, an atrocious parody of his kingship" (*Insegnamenti VII* [1982], 874).

Dear brothers and sisters, the worldwide devotion to St Rita is symbolized by the rose. It is to be hoped that the life of everyone devoted to her will be like the rose picked in the garden of Roccaporena the winter before the saint's death. That is, let it be a life sustained by passionate love for the Lord Jesus; a life capable of responding to suffering and to thorns with forgiveness and the total gift of self, in order to spread everywhere the good odour of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 2:15) through a consistently lived proclamation of the Gospel. Dear devoted pilgrims, Rita offers her rose to each of you: in receiving it spiritually strive to live as witnesses to a hope that never disappoints and as missionaries of a life that conquers death.

5. I now extend my cordial greeting to the members of the Italian National Federation of the Knights of Labour, who have come to Rome to celebrate their Jubilee. I welcome you all. Dear friends, your activity seeks to improve the economic and social standing of workers. I hope that through your efforts you can always contribute to the common good, to the formation of young people who will have a place in the world of production, to the gradual elimination of unjust inequalities and to the solution of the worrying problem of unemployment.

As you face the rapid changes affecting modern society, be ready to meet the current challenges of economics and globalization, without ever losing sight of the fundamental values of human dignity, solidarity with the weakest, the humanization of labour and the social nature of work.

6. Dear brothers and sisters, I invoke Mary's protection on you in this month which is particularly dedicated to her. Through her intercession and through the intercession of St Rita and St Benedict, may you and your loved ones be granted all the graces you need. I assure you of my prayer for this, as I cordially bless you all.

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