



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PILGRIMS FROM VARESE
FOR THE CENTENARY OF ACTIVITY
OF ST VICTOR'S "ORATORY"**

Saturday, 31 August 2002

1. I welcome you with joy and affection, dear friends from Varese who are commemorating the 100th anniversary of St Victor's "Young People's Oratory" and the Sports Association "*Robur et Fides*". I greet Bishop Marco Ferrari and I thank him for his courteous words. I greet Archbishop Pasquale Macchi and Bishop Giovanni Giudici. I also greet your parish priest and the other priests, as well as the mayor of the city and the civil authorities, who, by being present, witness to how much the community of Varese cherishes the "Oratory". I am particularly pleased to greet the new recruits: children and young people. Welcome, dear friends! I also thank the choirs for their beautiful singing.

2. It is remarkable that such an important pilgrimage has been promoted for the centenary of a young peoples' recreation centre. Not only does this show the close ties of your community with the "Oratory" but also, and even more, it highlights the high esteem in which you hold it. I rejoice with you because you are carrying on an educational initiative: the "Oratory" is its *vibrant centre*, the "workshop" of faith that is just waiting to be combined with every aspect of the life and feelings of young people: *a faith full of life for a life full of faith!*

Pastoral service to youth along with the *pastoral care of families* are the priorities of the Church in Italy. The "Oratory" is the place where these two pastoral activities naturally *converge*: a place of education and co-education, which very appropriately backs up the educational task of parents. Children need an environment in which, with other persons and other dynamics, to reinforce the values they have learned at home. *Sports activities* make an effective contribution to this. Indeed, if well integrated into the formation, they help young people to be generous and mutually supportive. May *Robur et Fides* be distinguished always by its generous openness to solidarity.

3. The "Oratory" is a *school of service*, where they learn to work generously for the community, for little ones, and for the poor. Service, motivated by prayer, is a preferred route for the birth and growth of *genuine vocations* to the priesthood, to the consecrated and missionary life, and of solid lay vocations, of married and unmarried people, shaped by dedication to serving others. Always keep this spirit alive in your "Oratory" and your sports association. Walk as one family in order to be "*the salt of the earth and the light of the world*" (Mt 5,13-14).

I entrust you to Our Blessed Mother and bless you warmly, together with your loved ones and your activities.