



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ITALIAN SPORTS CENTRE

Saturday, 26 June 2004

Dear Friends of the Italian Sports Centre,

1. Welcome to this meeting that commemorates the 60th anniversary of your praiseworthy institution, founded to evangelize the world of Sport in Italy. I welcome you and I greet you all with affection. I greet the Prelates present, starting with Cardinal Camillo Ruini, President of the Italian Bishops' Conference. I am especially grateful to him for describing your Association's programmes and projects to me just now. I greet your directors, trainers, referees and umpires, leaders and chaplains. I extend a cordial greeting to Mons. Vittorio Peri, the [Italian] National Ecclesiastical Consultant, and to Mr Edio Costantini, the National President. Above all, I greet you, dear young athletes, and thank you for your warm welcome.

2. "Arise" (Lk 7: 14). I would like on this occasion to take up the Lord's invitation to the young man of Nain, which was the theme of my recent Apostolic Pilgrimage to Switzerland, to reflect also with you on the meaning of your mission in the Church and in society.

"Arise! Listen! Set out!". I addressed these words to the young people at the Ice Palace of Bern this past 5 June. I repeat the same invitation to you, dear friends of the Italian Sports Centre. Each one of you is called to follow Christ and to be his witness in the context of sport.

You are well aware of this unique vocation and, as your Association's cultural and sports programme states, you mean not only to promote sport within Italian society but also to contribute to answering the fundamental questions the new generations are asking about the meaning of life, its purpose and its goal. You thus intend to promote a sporting mindset and culture which, by actually "doing sport" and not only "talking about sport", will help people rediscover the full truth about the human person.

3. The Italian Sports Centre came into existence 60 years ago with this goal: to propose to young people, then marked by the appalling consequences of the Second World War, the practice of sports, not only as a source of physical well-being but as an ideal of life, courageous, positive, optimistic and a means for the integral renewal of the individual person and of society. My venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Pius XII, then asked your Sodality to be the leaven of Christianity in stadiums, on roads, on mountains, at sea, wherever your banner is raised with honour (cf. *Address to the Italian Sports Centre*, 1955).

In the course of the years, dear friends, you have tried to stay faithful to this behest, presenting the Italian Sports Centre as a school for authentic human formation. You have toiled to acquaint children, young people and adults with the riches and beauty of the Gospel, through various types of sports. You have helped them to encounter Jesus and choose him as their ultimate *raison d'être*.

4. Still today this is your mission, and society still needs it. The efforts of your sports' association to promote sport as a formative experience in the parishes, schools and throughout the territory, will help the young generations to choose and to foster the authentic values of life: love for truth and justice, the taste for beauty and goodness, the search for genuine freedom and peace.

In our time, organized sport sometimes seems conditioned by the logic of profit, of the spectacular, of doping, exasperated rivalry and episodes of violence. It is also your task to proclaim and to witness to the humanizing power of the Gospel with regard to the practise of sport, which if lived in accordance with the Christian outlook, becomes a "generative principle" of profound human relations and encourages the building of a more serene and supportive world.

I hope that you, especially, dear young athletes, will practise sport with loyalty and a healthy spirit of competition. In this way it will help you to face the demanding competition of life with courage and honesty, with joy and with calm confidence in the future.

Through Mary's intercession, I entrust the entire family of the Italian Sports Centre and all its projects for good to the Lord, and I bless you all with affection.