

## **Welcome, Ca from all over the world!**

**Paola BIGNARDI**

*ICA's National President*

In the name of Italian Catholic Action, I would like to extend a "thank you" and a warm welcome to you all.

Italian Catholic Action is pleased and honoured to welcome today representatives of Catholic Action Movements and Associations from all over the world.

During our opening prayer, which was "one" and at the same time "plural", we have experienced a deep sense of gratitude for each of us. Gratitude for the miracle of faith that unites us and helps us to appreciate our diversities as a richness. Gratitude for the Catholic Action that makes us feel one family and gives the experience of each of our Association the boundaries of the world.

I think that we have many reasons to be happy this evening at the opening of our Assembly that follows the World Congress of Catholic Laity, which closed in this hall just two days ago. I would like to share with you some reflections inspired by this meeting. It was a special occasion which will definitely leave an imprint on the life of the Church and above all on our lives as laypeople.

Among the many topics we have reflected upon during this Congress, there are those enlisted by the Pope in his message. In particular he entrusted us the Documents of the Council once again as a new horizon for the life of today's and tomorrow's Church; for the life of our Associations, for the life of our Catholic Action. I feel that the Pope has asked us to grasp in this great event and in his magisterium a spur to renewal, as if he entrusted us, laypeople, with a special task: that of following and putting into practice the indications given by the Council.

It seems to me that, together with the Council, the Pope has passed on to us the Church's will for renewal; a renewal of her way of meeting today's world and its implicit call for the Gospel. Faced with this call for the Gospel, we, as laypeople, feel with a new urgency the need to carry out our mission and to bear witness in a more courageous and relevant way. After this Congress, laypeople are asked to be more conscious and convinced of their share in the Church's mission. We are convinced that without our presence in the different spheres of everyday life, it is impossible for the Church today to reach people's lives and consciences; without our witness and our capacity it is impossible for the Gospel to meet today's cultures. I would say that a strong message which has come out clearly from this Congress is the necessity of laypeople's mission and witness in the world. This has allowed us to go beyond the questions about laypeople's life and vocation and to recognize in the mission, in our mission in the world, the right way to practice our vocation.

There was a time, following the Council, when I think we were surprised, above all, at the possibility which was given and acknowledged to us to live our co-responsibility in the Church; a time when we rejoiced even with surprise for the dignity acknowledged to us. Today we are beyond that; today we have come to the point when we should live up with the responsibility which the Church is placing on us with a particular urgency, because the world needs our witnessing. It is craving for the Gospel and needs to see living witnesses of the salvific Word. The Congress of the Laity has also offered an ecclesial panorama of the various ecclesial movements and associations which render the Church so rich. Faced with these old and new groups, it is up also to Catholic Action to take up the challenge of reviewing its being a gift and of seeking to be faithful to it.

We are here precisely to revive our consciousness of being Catholic Action. During this time of reflection, we should rediscover the ideal which underlies our concrete commitment. We are here also to ask ourselves as to how we live up to this gift; to rediscover our faithfulness to it and to search what needs to be changed, where we need to renew ourselves and to find out new ways as to how we can be faithful to this everlasting gift.

These reflections should always be in our minds during our days together here. I think that in dealing with these questions, we will be passionately united in some moments and quieter in others. But we are also here to see that Catholic Action may go on being a gift by accomplishing its task, keeping the whole world as its field of action.

We really wish that this Assembly, this exchange of experiences, may be for us a splendid

occasion to live together in a brotherly atmosphere; a time to rediscover the freshness of the ideal which inspires our choices and our lives; to find out new ideas as to how we can give substance, through concrete actions, to the beauty of our vocation.

**III Ordinary Assembly - Rome, December 2nd-6th 2000**

***Catholic Action: lay faithful who live the ever newness of the Gospel and are a sign of communion***

**THE LASTING ACTUALITY OF A GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**