

Meeting with the Holy Father Benedict XVI

Rome, Piazza San Pietro

4th May 2008



Dear Children, Young People and Adults of Catholic Action,

It is a great joy to me to welcome you here today in St Peter's Square where in the past your praiseworthy Association has frequently met the Successor of Peter. Thank you for your visit. I greet with affection all of you who have come from every part of Italy, as well as the members of the International Forum who come from 40 Countries of the world. In particular, I greet Prof. Luigi Alici, your National President, whom I thank for his cordial words addressed to me, Mons. Domenico Sigalini, your Assistant General, and the national and diocesan leaders. I also thank you for the special gift you have desired to offer to me through your representatives which testifies to your solidarity with the neediest. I express deep gratitude to Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, President of the Italian Bishops' Conference who has celebrated Holy Mass for you.

You have come to Rome in the spiritual company of your numerous Saints, Blesseds, Venerables and Servants of God: men and women, young people and children, educators and priest chaplains, rich in Christian virtues, who have grown up in the ranks of Catholic Action which is celebrating its 140th anniversary in these days. The magnificent crown of faces that symbolically embraces St Peter's Square is a tangible witness of a holiness rich in light and love. These witnesses, who followed Jesus with all their strength, who spared no efforts for the Church and for the Kingdom of God, represent your most authentic identity card. Is it not still possible today for you boys and girls, young people and adults, to make your life a witness of communion with the Lord that is transformed into a genuine masterpiece of holiness? Is this not your Association's purpose? This will certainly be possible if Catholic Action continues to be faithful to its own deep roots of faith, nourished by full adherence to the Word of God, by unconditional love for the Church, a vigilant participation in civil life and a constant commitment to formation. Dear friends, respond generously to this call to holiness in accordance with the ways that best suit your secular condition! Continue to let yourselves be inspired by the three great "consignments" that my Venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, entrusted to you at Loreto in 2004: contemplation, communion and mission.

Catholic Action is born as a particular association of lay faithful marked by a special and direct bond with the Pope, which quickly becomes a precious form of "collaboration of the laity in the hierarchical apostolate", "most earnestly" recommended by the Second Vatican Council, and which identifies its indispensable "characteristics" (cf. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity in

the Church, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 20). This vocation of yours is still valid today. I encourage you, therefore, to persevere with generosity in your service to the Church. By adopting its general apostolic goal in a spirit of intimate union with the Successor of Peter and hard-working co-responsibility with Pastors, you incarnate a ministerial role in a fruitful balance between the universal Church and the local Church, which requires you to make a ceaseless and irreplaceable contribution to communion.

This broad ecclesial dimension which identifies your association's charism is not the sign of an uncertain or outdated identity; rather, it attributes great responsibility to your lay vocation: illumined and sustained by the action of the Holy Spirit and constantly rooted in the journey of the Church, you are challenged to courageously seek ever new syntheses between the proclamation of Christ's salvation to the people of our time and the promotion of the integral good of the person and of the entire human family.

In my intervention at the Fourth National Ecclesial Convention held in Verona in October 2006, I recognized that the Church in Italy "is a lively reality - and we see it! -, which conserves a capillary presence in the midst of people of every age and level. "Christian traditions often continue to be rooted and to produce fruit, while a great effort of evangelization and catechesis is taking place, addressed particularly to the new generations, but now even more so to families" (Address to Fourth National Ecclesial Convention, Verona, 19 October 2006). How can we fail to see in this capillary presence also a discreet and tangible sign of Catholic Action? In fact, the beloved Italian Nation has always been able to count on men and women formed in your Association who are prepared to serve the cause of the common good disinterestedly, to build up a just ordering of society and the State. May you, therefore, be able to live up to your Baptism which immersed you in the death and Resurrection of Jesus for the salvation of every person whom you meet, and of a world that is thirsting for peace and truth. Be "worthy citizens of the Gospel" and "ministers of Christian wisdom for a more human world": this is the theme of your Assembly and this is the commitment you assume today before the Italian Church, represented here by you, by your priest chaplains, by the Bishops and by their President.

In a missionary Church, placed before an educational emergency such as that which is found in Italy today, may you who love and serve her be tireless heralds and trained and generous educators; in a Church called to give even very demanding proof of fidelity and tempted by adaptation, be courageous witnesses and prophets of Gospel radicalism; in a Church which is confronted daily by the relativist, hedonist and consumerist mentality, may you be able to extend the spaces of rationality in the sign of a faith that befriends intelligence, both in the context of a popular and widespread culture and in a more elaborated and thought-out research; in a Church that calls for the heroism of holiness, respond without fear, always trusting in God's mercy.

Dear friends of Italian Catholic Action you are not alone on the path that lies ahead of you: your saints accompany you. Other figures too have played significant roles in your Association: I am thinking for example, among the others of Giuseppe Toniolo and Armida Barelli. Inspired by these examples of Christianity lived out, you have embarked on an extraordinary year, a year that we could qualify by holiness, in which you strive to translate the Gospel teachings into practical life. I encourage you in this resolution. Intensify your prayer, reform your conduct on the eternal values of the Gospel, letting yourselves be guided by the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church. The Pope accompanies you with constant remembrance before the Lord, while he warmly imparts the Apostolic Blessing to you who are present here and to the entire Association.

V ORDINARY ASSEMBLY - Rome, 27 April – 4 May 2008

FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD (Jn 6,51) - Lay People in Catholic Action 20 years after *Christifideles Laici*