



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE FEDERATION FOR TRANSPORT
OF THE SICK TO LOURDES (OFTAL)
AND THE APOSTOLIC MOVEMENT FOR THE BLIND (MAC)***

St Peter's Basilica

Saturday, 17 March 2007

Dear Friends of OFTAL and of the Apostolic Movement for the Blind,

I meet you with great joy in the Vatican Basilica, where you have taken part in the Eucharistic celebration at which Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, my Secretary of State, to whom I offer a cordial greeting, has presided.

I greet Archbishop Angelo Comastri, Vicar General for Vatican City and Archpriest of the Vatican Basilica, and your Chaplains. I greet each one of you, and in particular Mons. Franco Degrandi, President of OFTAL, and Dr Francesco Scelzo, Vice-President of MAC, whom I thank for presenting to me your respective Associations, which came into being more or less at the same time.

In fact, the Apostolic Movement for the Blind was founded in 1928 through the insight and apostolic dynamism of Maria Motta, a sightless teacher from Monza endowed with profound faith and great strength of mind.

The Federation for Transport of the Sick to Lourdes (OFTAL), on the other hand, is celebrating its 75th anniversary. In fact, founded in 1913 by Mons. Alessandro Rastelli, a priest of the Diocese of Vercelli, it officially came into being in 1932, promoted by the Archbishop of that particular Church.

Your joint presence here today is providential, because both Associations, although they have many different aspects, have a fundamental one in common which I would like to highlight straightaway.

I refer to the fact that both MAC and OFTAL represent experiences of fraternal sharing based on the Gospel and capable of enabling people in difficulty, in this case the sick and the visually impaired, to participate fully in the life of the Ecclesial Community and to be builders of the civilization of love.

They are two institutions which, as the theme of the recent Ecclesial Convention in Verona said, bear witness to the Risen Christ, the hope of the world, demonstrating that faith and Christian friendship make it possible to overcome every condition of frailty together.

In this regard, the experience of the two Founders, Fr Rastelli and Maria Motta, is emblematic. The former went to Lourdes after an accident which confined him to a hospital for a month. The experience of sickness rendered him particularly sensitive to the message of the Immaculate Virgin, who called him to return to the Grotto of Massabielle, first in the company of a single sick person - and this is very important! -, and then at the head of the first diocesan pilgrimage with more than 300 people, of whom 30 were sick.

For Maria Motta, sightless from birth, the visual limitation was not a hindrance to her vocation; indeed, the Spirit made her an apostle of those who cannot see and later caused her project to become more successful than she herself expected.

From that spiritual "network" which she had created, a proper association formed by diocesan groups present in every part of Italy developed and was approved by Blessed John XXIII with the name of "Apostolic Movement for the Blind". In this movement, learning the style of reciprocity and sharing, both the non-seeing and the seeing were committed to formation, to devote themselves to serving the Church's Apostolic Mission.

Each of the two associations contributed to building the Church with its own specific charism.

You, friends of OFTAL, offer the *experience of the pilgrimage with the sick*, a strong sign of faith and solidarity among people who come out of themselves and from the closed environment of their own problems to set out for a common goal, a spiritual place: Lourdes, the Holy Land, Loreto, Fatima and other shrines.

Thus, you help the People of God to keep alive the awareness of their nature as pilgrims in Christ's footsteps, which stands out clearly in Sacred Scripture.

Let us think of the Book of Exodus upon which the liturgy makes us meditate this Lenten Season: let us think of Jesus' public life which the Gospels present as a great pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where his "exodus" is to take place.

You, friends of MAC, are messengers in your turn of a typical experience which is your very own;

that of *walking together, the non-seeing side by side with the seeing*. It is proof of how Christian love makes it possible to overcome handicaps and to live diversity positively, as an opportunity for openness to others, as attention to their problems but first of all to their gifts, and to mutual service.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Church is also in need of your contribution to respond faithfully and without reserve to the Lord's will. And of civil society one can likewise say: humanity needs your gifts, which are a prophecy of the Kingdom of God.

May limitations and scant resources not alarm you: God likes to carry out his works using poor means. He therefore asks you to make a generous faith available to him!

Basically, this is why you have come here: to implore at Peter's tomb the gift of a sounder faith.

Tomorrow you will be ending your pilgrimage at two of Rome's Marian sites: MAC at the Basilica of St Mary Major, and OFTAL at the Shrine of Our Lady of Divine Love. Set out, therefore, from this moment of grace, enlightened by the faith of Peter and Mary!

And with this faith, continue on your way, also accompanied by my prayers and my Blessing, which I impart with affection to those of you who are present here and to all your members and your loved ones.

© Copyright 2007 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana