



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF ITALIAN MUNICIPALITIES**

Clementine Hall

Saturday, 12 March 2011

Distinguished Mayors,

I address my cordial greeting to you all and I thank you for coming, now a long-standing tradition. This is testified by the Audiences granted to you by Venerable [John Paul II](#) and by previous Pontiffs, as the President of the Association mentioned. I thank him for the fine words full of realism — as well as of poetry and beauty — with which he introduced our Meeting.

This tradition testifies to the special bond that exists between the Pope, Bishop of Rome and Primate of Italy, and the Italian Nation, one of whose characteristics is, precisely, its many colourful towns and villages.

The first idea that springs to mind in meeting Representatives of the National Association of Italian Municipalities is that of their origin, the expression of a community which meets, enters into dialogue, celebrates and plans together, a community of believers which celebrates the Sunday Liturgy and gathers afterwards in the squares of the ancient towns or, in country places, outside the village church.

In an ode to the people of Carnia, [Giosuè] Carducci, an Italian poet, once recalled: “I see in the grazing season the rustic virtue of the commune, set in the enveloping, opaque cool. Following the harvest, the day of festivity...”.

Today too we feel the need to live in a brotherly community where, for example, even amidst the many tensions and sufferings of modern life the parish and the municipality are at the same time architects of a just and supportive *modus vivendi*.

The multiplicity of people and situations is not in contradiction with the national Unity, recalled by the 150th anniversary that is being commemorated. Unity and plurality, at different levels, including the ecclesiological level, are reciprocally enriching values if they are kept in the proper reciprocal balance.

Two principles that permit this harmonious coexistence of unity and plurality are subsidiarity and solidarity, which are characteristic of the Church's social teaching. The subject of this social doctrine consists of truths that do not belong exclusively to the patrimony of believers but are rationally accessible to everyone.

Moreover, I reflected on these principles in the Encyclical *Caritatis in Veritate*, where the principle of subsidiarity is considered to be an "expression of inalienable human freedom". Indeed, "subsidiarity is first and foremost a form of assistance to the human person via the autonomy of intermediate bodies. Such assistance is offered when individuals or groups are unable to accomplish something on their own, and it is always designed to achieve their emancipation, because it fosters freedom and participation through assumption of responsibility" (n. 57).

"Hence the principle of subsidiarity is particularly well-suited to managing globalization and directing it toward authentic human development" (*ibid.*).

"The principle of subsidiarity must remain closely linked to the principle of solidarity and vice versa, since the former without the latter gives way to social privatism, while the latter without the former gives way to paternalist social assistance that is demeaning to those in need" (n. 58).

These principles should also be applied at the municipal level, in a dual sense: in relations with the public authorities of the State, Region and Province, as well as in the relationship of the municipal authorities with the social bodies and with the intermediate groups present in the territory.

Such groups carry out highly useful social work, since they advocate humanization and socialization and are especially dedicated to the marginalized and the deprived. They also include numerous church bodies, such as parishes, after-school recreation, religious houses, Catholic educational institutes and those that provide social assistance. I hope that this invaluable activity will always meet with the proper appreciation and support, also in financial terms.

In this regard I would like to reaffirm that the Church demands no privileges but only asks to be able to carry out her mission freely, as effective respect for religious freedom requires. In Italy religious freedom permits the collaboration that exists between the civil and ecclesial communities. Unfortunately in other countries Christian minorities are all too often victims of discrimination and persecution.

I wish to express my appreciation of the motion that was unanimously approved on 3 February

2011 by your National Council, with the invitation to sensitize to these phenomena those Municipalities that belong to the Association and at the same time to reinforce the “undeniable character of religious freedom as the foundation for free and peaceful coexistence among peoples”.

I would like to emphasize further the importance of the topic of “citizenship” which you have placed at the centre of your work. On this theme the Church in Italy is developing a rich reflection, especially since the Ecclesial Convention in Verona, because citizenship is one of the fundamental contexts of the life and coexistence of peoples.

The upcoming National Eucharistic Congress in Ancona will also dedicate a day to this important subject, to which, as we have been informed, the Mayors of Italy have appropriately been invited.

Citizenship today fits exactly into the context of globalization which is characterized among other things by immense migratory flows. In the face of this situation, as I mentioned earlier, must be combined solidarity and respect for the law, so that social coexistence may not be disturbed and that importance be given to the principles of law and the cultural and religious traditions at the origin of the Italian nation.

As local administrators who are close to the daily life of the people, you are particularly aware of this need. Special dedication is asked of you in the public service you carry out for citizens, so that you may champion collaboration, solidarity and humanity.

History has given us the example of Mayors who, with their prestige and dedication, left a mark on the life of their communities, as you rightly recalled Giorgio La Pira, an exemplary Christian and an esteemed public administrator.

May this tradition continue to bear fruit for the good of the country and its citizens! I assure you of my prayers for this and I beseech you, dear friends, to trust in the Lord for, as the Psalm says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain” (127[126]:1).

As I invoke the motherly intercession of the Virgin Mary, venerated by the Italian people at her many Shrines, places of spirituality, art and culture, and of the holy Patrons Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena, I bless you all, your collaborators and the entire Italian Nation.