



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE VOLUNTEERS OF THE DIOCESE OF ROME

Saturday, 10 November 2001

Dear Volunteers,

1. I greet you warmly at the end of the Eucharistic celebration with which you wished to open this session, organized as part of the observance of the UN International Year of Volunteers 2001, as set by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

I cordially greet the Cardinal Vicar and I thank him for his kinds words of respectful greeting. With him, I greet Bishop Armando Brambilla, Bishop Delegate for Pastoral Care of the Roman hospitals, confraternities and religious associations. I also greet those who head the *Caritas* and *Migrantes* organizations in the Church in Rome, as well as the participants in the convention sponsored by the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart and the Agostino Gemelli Polyclinic of Rome. I greet you all, dear brothers and sisters, who are eager to serve your brethren following the example of Jesus who, after washing his disciples' feet on the eve of his Passion, said to them: "*I have given you an example, that as I have done, you also should do*" (Jn 13,15).

What example is he speaking of? The answer is obvious from the context in which these words were spoken. In performing a service for his Apostles that was usually reserved for slaves, he foretold his death on the following day, when he was to give himself on Calvary. Jesus is speaking, therefore, of a total, unconditional love on which he wants to inspire his disciples to learn how to model their behaviour.

The Lord's words at the Last Supper, should be for you a lifelong programme: in fact, your unqualified mission consists in reproducing the actions of the One who, although he was in the form of God, out of love took the form of a servant (cf. Phil 2,6-7).

2. In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* I invited the whole Church to "put out into the deep", namely, with vigour and renewed enthusiasm, to spread the Gospel in the new millennium. Today this appeal resounds particularly for you, who are called to collaborate in a unique way in the work of the new evangelization.

Thank you for your generous witness in a society that is all too often dominated by the yearning to have and to possess! As faithful disciples and imitators of Christ, you are urged to go against the current, choosing the evangelical option of serving the brethren, not only because you are motivated by the desire of achieving legitimate objectives of social justice, but also, and above all, because you are impelled by the unceasing power of divine charity.

The field of action that unfolds daily before your eyes is enormous. Indeed, many serious problems afflict our society. Looking at the reality of our City, how can you not recognize, unfortunately, the shortcomings of the social services and the inadequacies of the basic services in various outlying districts, serious forms of inequality of income and of access to such primary goods as education, housing and health care. Then what can be said of the marginalization of beggars, nomads, drug addicts and AIDS patients, not to mention the disintegration of families that penalizes the weakest, and of the forms of physical or psychological violence inflicted on women or children? And how can we forget the problems associated with immigration and with the growing number of lonely elderly people, of the sick and of the underprivileged?

This disturbing social scene that is often combined with a regrettable lack of respect for life and for the human person and a disconcerting absence of moral and religious values, challenges the institutions first, but is also a particular incentive to the Christian community, which has always seen charity as a primary route to evangelization and human advancement.

3. Volunteer work, so widespread in Italy, is an authentic "sign of the times" and reveals a keen awareness of the solidarity that links human beings. By giving citizens an opportunity to take an active part in the management of the services intended for them and for the various structures and institutions, volunteer work contributes to bringing to them the "supplement of soul" which makes them more human and respectful of the human person.

To carry out their prophetic role, the actions of volunteers must be faithful to certain typical and essential features: first and foremost the desire for the authentic promotion of persons and of the common good that goes beyond the minimum of necessary assistance, then the spirit of unselfish generosity that, after the example of the Lord Jesus, must always shape the activity of believers.

The life-style of the volunteers who witness to the Gospel should be carefully maintained, even when they benefit from the forms of economic support provided by law for performing the tasks of volunteer work.

Dear friends, may every inhabitant of our city, no matter what his race or religion, find in you generous brothers and sisters who know how to practise charity, not as pure philanthropy, but in the name of Christ. To remain faithful to this vocation, persevere in prayer and in listening to the word of God, as well as in participating in the Eucharist. In this way you will be able to discern in your suffering brethren the face of the Lord, contemplated in your prayer and in the celebration of the divine mysteries. Thus you will contribute to the work of the Permanent Mission, to which in recent years I have so often called the diocesan Church of Rome.

With these hopes, I entrust you to the motherly protection of Our Lady, *Salus Populi Romani*, and I wholeheartedly impart to each one of you my Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to your relatives and friends and to all who benefit from your daily service.