

# Blessed John Paul II Speaks to Athletes

## Homilies, Messages and Speeches on Sport



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by Bishop Carlo Mazza

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## INTRODUCTION

by Monsignor<sup>\*</sup> Carlo Mazza

The Church, “expert in humanity” -according to the well noted phrase of Paul VI- looks benevolently upon sport with its individual, social and cultural dimensions, giving each one of these a positive evaluation. The Church recognizes the role that sport can play in perfecting the human person with its potential to moderate human instinct and its capacity to gather people together towards a common goal, promoting fellowship, solidarity, and peace through its universal appeal and ability to draw people from different cultures and backgrounds together in friendly competition. This vast horizon of positive opportunities confers on sport a generous yield, especially when it is a human action carried out with respect for the rules and in a healthy competitive spirit. These sound results are complemented by an enrichment of the person and of society, in an experience of self satisfaction as well as the joy of community.

In order to have an immediate panorama of the vast and complex world of sport today, we can borrow from the French author, Bernard Jeu. According to him, traces of all aspects of reality are to be found in sport: the aesthetic aspect (because sport is observed); the technical aspect (because sport is learned); the commercial aspect (because sport is sold as a good and used to sell many other goods); the political aspect (because sport exalts cities and nations, while at the same time it can cross boundaries and frontiers); the medical aspect (because it implies the exercise of the body); the legal aspect (because without universal rules, competition is not possible); the religious aspect (because it has religious roots and –as some claim- has become a modern religion).<sup>1</sup>

In this perspective, sport appears as something all encompassing, universal, and of immense cultural resonance with respect to many other human activities. In fact, as sport grows in popularity, in practice, and in media presence, it is becoming a point of convergence for diverse interests, an attractive professional field of interest, a multidisciplinary school of different ways of thought, a huge business network, and a phenomenon of our epoch. Furthermore, through its constant expansion, sport it cuts across and permeates significant sectors of individual and social life, soliciting and even manipulating new interests, under numerous aspects, that were not present in the original and neutral state of athletic activity.

Before this imposing phenomenon of modern sport, the Church has not been afraid of confronting “in a sporting way” –if I may use such a term- this great challenge. The Church has formulated an

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<sup>1</sup> See B. JEU, *Le sport, la mort, la violence*, PUF, Paris 1976.

original reflection with regard to sport, and has encouraged its proper practice of it, first in the area of education within the Church, and later within the greater realm of civil society.

It should be immediately noted here that the Church's "way of thinking" regarding sport, which began in an initial form and gradually developed with greater intensity and clarity, has come about by the wise intuition and the acute sensibility of the Supreme pontiffs, independently of their personal involvement in sports or their predisposition for sporting activity. In fact, the pontiffs throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century have shown a special interest in sport, even if some of their discourses were only for a specific occasion. These discourses manifest an enlightened perception of the evident value that sport plays within a modern culture that has been shaped by rapid change in the wake of the industrial revolution and the subsequent changes in the customs and lifestyles of the masses, as well as the frantic quest by man to affirm his own subjectivity and individual freedom.

Regarding the sporting phenomena, the Pontiffs have outlined a unique synthesis that, at first glance, does not seem to arise from any one school of thought. It is founded upon and guided by principles of the moral order pertaining to the physical well being and the supernatural purpose of the human person. They have noted the physical, psychological, and spiritual benefits that come from the practice of sport, while, at the same time, they have underlined the risks and related dangers that derive from serious distortions of fundamental ethical norms.

Through the years, a sort of Church "doctrine" regarding sport has been emerging little by little, which is capable of interpreting sporting phenomena, in the light of the faith, and in connection to the general ethical principles of the natural and supernatural order. Yet, this set of teachings has never been developed to the point of reaching a mature and organic synthesis in an official Church document.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, in the pontifical teachings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from Pius X to John Paul II, and most recently with Pope Benedict XVI, we can find a homogenous and progressive "corpus" of sporting discourses, to which new content regarding the ethical, the cultural, and the practice of sport, continue to be added, with their emphasis on one theme or another, depending on the particular audience being addressed and their social-cultural context.<sup>3</sup>

A preliminary analysis of these papal texts reveals no immediate or explicit intention to develop an organic formulation of the thought of the Church regarding sport in a systematic way. In fact, each pontifical intervention was made within a particular ecclesial context, and determined in great part by the specific characteristics of the audience, and often tied to a particular circumstance or the celebration of a particular event or activity within the Church or within society as a whole. Consequently, these exterior factors have determined the quality of these pontifical addresses, in as much as they were restricted by time from fully developing a theme, or often limited to essential or practical indications, frequently sparse in biblical or theological references, and tailored to the audience being addressed.

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that the Pontiffs of the 20th century gave over 200 discourses (from simple greetings, to more elaborate speeches) that can be divided among them in this way: Pius X, 3; Benedict XV, 1; Pius XI, 5; Pius XII, 20; John XXIII, 9; Paul VI, 35; John Paul II, 120. A comprehensive collection of these messages, as well as a systematic and rigorous study is needed.

<sup>3</sup> Some informal "collections" of these Papal discourses in Italian were published by the following: G. PINTO, *Lo sport negli insegnamenti pontifici da Pio X a Paolo VI*, ed. AVE, Roma 1964; E. DE PANFILIS, *Tempo libero, turismo e sport: la risposta della Chiesa*, vol. 1-2, ed. Libreria Gregoriana, Padova 1986; C. RINALDI, *Giovanni Paolo II e lo sport*, Movimento Sportivo Popolare Europeo, Roma 1990; G.B. GANDOLFO-L. VASSALLO, *Lo sport nei documenti pontifici*, ed. La Scuola, Brescia 1994.

During the work of the Council, and in particular when drawing up the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*, the topic of sport entered the discussion for the first time.<sup>4</sup> The debate concluded with the decision to incorporate this topic into paragraph 61 of the chapter entitled, “The proper development of culture”. In this number, the Council recognized that “physical exercise and sport help to create harmony of feeling even on the level of the community as well as foster friendly relations between men of all classes, countries, and races.”<sup>5</sup>

This fact assumes historical relevance and reveals a new approach as it situates sport among those activities which are at the very heart of a culture. This placement, while offering sport unexpected attention, at the same time enabled a more precise, dynamic and critical interpretation of it that is in step with the rapid changes of the time. In this way, the new horizon opened by the Council led the Church right into the middle of the phenomenon of sport, together with its potential for good as well as its contradictions, facilitating a necessary dialogue, as well as an even more necessary “evangelization” of this “new areopagus”.

### *The Church’s genuine interest in sport*

Before this perspective, it is good to briefly pause to ask “why” the Church was, and continues to be concerned about sport. Certainly it is not for its own sporting interest or any other social interest. The Church is above all concerned about the human person: the profound destiny of humanity and the mission of revealing to all people the only Saviour, Jesus Christ and the identification with his way of life as the path to salvation. With the specific reference made to the “sports person” and to “sporting activity”, the Church has expressed a wise and convincing theological and spiritual doctrine that overcomes the spiritual or material dualism that have often impeded an objective and comprehensive understanding of sport. At the same time, the Church provides concrete points of application regarding its practice.

The inquiry about the ultimate meaning of sport for the Church was expressly made by Pius XII. In an address to Roman athletes, Pius XII applied St. Paul’s exhortation, “Whether you eat or drink, whatever it is that you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1Cor 10:31) to all physical activity and this consequently includes sport. In fact he boldly exclaims: “How can the Church not be interested in sport?”<sup>6</sup> By this rhetorical question he intended to dispel the lurking opinions that rejected the idea that the Church could have any interest whatsoever in the practice of sport.

With this point well established, it can then be more readily stated that the Church “sees in sport a gymnasium of the spirit, a means to exercise moral education; and because of this it admires, approves, and encourages the practice of sport in its various forms, that of youth sports whose practice harmonically develops the body in its physical potential, as well as the competitive sport.”<sup>7</sup> The Church’s interest, then, is directed to man and the temporal dimension of his life. Motivated by a genuine care for the person, in both his or her physical and spiritual well-being, the Church also

<sup>4</sup> See A. LATTUADA, *Lo sport nel magistero della Chiesa*, in “Fede e sport. Fondamenti, contesti, proposte pastorali”, ed. Piemme, Casale Monferro 1994, 67-68.

<sup>5</sup> VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, n. 61.

<sup>6</sup> PIUS XII, *Address to Roman Athletes*, May 20, 1945. English translation found in R. FEENEY, *A Catholic Perspective: Physical Exercise and Sport*, Aquinas Press, Virginia 1995, 28. Original Italian text found in “Discorsi e radiomessaggi di Pio XII” VII (1945), 56.

<sup>7</sup> PAUL VI, *Address to cyclists of Giro d’Italia*, May 30, 1964 [our translation]. Original Italian text can be found in G.B. GANDOLFO-L. VASSALLO (editors), *Lo sport nei documenti pontifici*, ed. La Scuola, Brescia 1994, 151.

has concern for sport in as much as it is “ordered to the intellectual and moral perfection of the soul”.<sup>8</sup>

To better understand the reason behind the Church’s interest for sport, we will take a look at some of the most salient moments in which the Church has manifested this attention. It is not the mere question of “what does the Church think about sport”, as if the Church were simply a public opinion agency. No. Rather, the question must be “how does the Church realize her mission in sport?” in as much as the Church as a community of witnesses in the Risen Christ announces the message of salvation even within the world of sport.

*The goal of sport is the good of the person*

One of the continual themes throughout the teaching of the Church regarding sport is the expression of utmost concern in safeguarding the integrity of the human person. This is a line of thought that is rooted in Christian anthropology and the social doctrine of the Church, especially the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity. In light of the inalienable value of the dignity and integrity of the person as a unity of body and soul, the Church asks sport not only to respect the identity of the person, but also to allow the individual to develop his or her full potential with regard to God’s plan for his or her life.

In sport, the human body is the “instrument”; but the body is not an end in itself. Pius XII clarifies this in a noted discourse on the four purposes of sport, where he states: “sport and gymnastics have, as their immediate purposes, that of the education, development, and strengthening the body in its constitution and power of movement. As their more remote purpose, you have the use made, by the soul, of the body so prepared, for the development of the interior or exterior life of the person; as their still deeper purpose, that of contributing to its perfection; and lastly, there is the supreme purpose of man as man, the goal common to every form of human activity –that of bringing man closer to God.”<sup>9</sup>

Outlining these fundamental “ends” enables one to better determine sport’s global value for the Church. These four purposes of sport constitute an essential nucleus that can be understood in light of an underlying “theology of the body”. In fact, it is the theological and spiritual elaboration of this theme that engages a dynamic hermeneutic that draws from divine Revelation. From this we can deduce that the true theological motivation is founded on a Christian anthropology that is not in anyway juxtaposed to the original plan of God the Creator, but rather, substantially linked to it.

As Pius XII also notes: “The human body is, in its own right, God’s masterpiece in the order of visible creation. The Lord has intended that it should flourish here below and enjoy immortality in the glory of heaven. He has linked it to spirit in the unity of the human nature, to give to the soul a taste of the enchantment of the works of God’s hands, to help it to see the Creator of them both in his mirror, and so to know, adore and love Him.”<sup>10</sup>

Here the emphasis is placed on the value of the body and its role within God’ plan and its auxiliary function with regard to the soul. In this way, sport itself becomes a precious instrument in

<sup>8</sup> PIUS XII, *Address to the Italian Sports Centre*, October 9, 1955 [our translation]. Original Italian text in “Discorsi e radiomessaggi di Pio XII” XVII (1955), 283.

<sup>9</sup> PIUS XII, *Address to participants of the Italian National Scientific Congress for Sport and Physical Education*, November 8, 1952. English translation from R. FEENEY, *A Catholic Perspective: Physical Exercise and Sport*, Aquinas Press, Virginia 1995, 45.

<sup>10</sup> PIUS XII, *Address to Roman Athletes*, May 20, 1945. English translation from R. FEENEY, *op.cit.*, 28. Original Italian text in “Discorsi e radiomessaggi di Pio XII” VII (1945), 56.

promoting “the formation of the complete man and the perfect Christian who thinks and acts according to reason enlightened by the faith.”<sup>11</sup>

With an even greater attention and sensibility to the conquests of modern scientific research, John Paul II made the following observation that places the person at the very centre of this activity. He states: “Sport, as you well know, is an activity that involves more than the movement of the body; it demands use of intelligence and the disciplining of the will. It reveals, in other words, the wonderful structure of the human person created by God as a spiritual being, a unity of body and spirit. Athletic activity can help every man and woman to recall that moment when God the Creator gave origin to the human person, the masterpiece of his creative work.”<sup>12</sup>

In synthesis, the Magisterium places the human person at the centre of sporting activity, by which his person becomes “perfected” through the simultaneous convergence of all of the human faculties. The person is the irreplaceable, invaluable, and indispensable point of reference for every sporting activity. In this way, sport is directly and synthetically linked to the true identity of the person, as he or she was originally created, and destined for glory. While the Church clearly recognises the inherent value of sport, at the same time, the Church expresses concern for the true authenticity of sport. The Church is attentive to the possible deviations that contradict sport’s true purpose and, worse still, that harm the integrity of the person. Because of this, sport is also placed within the realm of human activities that are in need of salvation.

### *Sport as an ascetic path to human and Christian virtues*

Sport’s ascetical dimension has always been recognized and the Pontiffs have affirmed this often and in numerous ways. As John Paul II noted, “Christian life is like a rather demanding sport, combining all a person’s energies to direct them towards the perfection of character, towards a goal which realizes in our humanity ‘the measure of Christ’s gift’ (Eph 4:7).”<sup>13</sup> They have exhorted athletes to pursue the sporting ideal, but above all, they have invited them to broaden their perspective of sport so as to include the pursuit of the moral ideals of excellence, and thus reach their integral perfection.<sup>14</sup>

Ancient philosophy taught that “the truth is always in the soul”.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, every human action cannot but manifest the ontological nature of man, since this is the goal towards which all his actions are ultimately directed as a spiritual being. When sport harmoniously enters this process of authentic personal growth, and does so as a practice that is conscious of reaching its goal only through a gradual process of learning that is both interior and exterior, it consequently engages the interior dynamism of “arete” or virtue, as a habit that is practiced in personal and social life. But, virtue is not reached without acknowledging the soul and without acting accordingly and coherently with this knowledge. Consequently, virtue is the result of an active apprenticeship, just as a skill is acquired in sport. In fact, the relationship between virtue and sport is richly revealed and affirmed in the experience of sport that engages the entire person in all of their faculties and at all levels,

<sup>11</sup> PIUS XII, *Address to Cyclists of Giro d’Italia*, June 26, 1946. English translation from R. FEENEY, *op.cit.*, 37. Original Italian text in “Discorsi e radiomessaggi di Pio XII” VIII (1946), 131.

<sup>12</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Address to participants of Athletic Championship: Be examples of human virtues*, “L’Osservatore Romano” Weekly English Edition, n. 36, September 7, 1987, 5.

<sup>13</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Address to conference of Sports and Ethics: Sports can be viewed as a service to mankind*. “L’Osservatore Romano” Weekly English Edition N. 2, January 8, 1990, 5.

<sup>14</sup> See PAUL VI, *Address to participants of Giro d’Italia*, May 30, 1964, found in G.B. GANDOLFO-L. VASSALLO, *Lo sport nei documenti Pontifici*, ed. La Scuola, Brescia 1994, 151.

<sup>15</sup> PLATO, *The Meno*, 85b.

whether at the highest level, or the most basic. For it is in playing that we most easily learn how to dominate our passions and orientate them towards a higher goal.

Because of this, Pius XII taught that: “the discipline of sport becomes a kind of ascetic of human and Christian virtues.”<sup>16</sup> In like manner, Paul VI saw sport as a way to teach moral education and asceticism, stating: “There is not a better school for teaching fairness than the exercise of sport for it despises any attempt of cheating as unsportsmanlike. And what asceticism! What an antidote against laziness, indolence and idleness. There is no teacher more demanding than that of sport! How much discipline, how much sacrifice, how much self dominion, courage, and tenacity is required!”<sup>17</sup>

Thus we can say that there can be found in these writings on sporting activity an explicit reference to asceticism and the moral life, in as much as these are present in the intentionality of Christian action. In this way, sport assumes in its historical and anthropological dimension a model of moral action that is especially related to the gratuitous gift of self.

### *Sport as a valuable educational tool*

The Church’s teaching regarding sports activity is above all centred in a systematic way on its educational potential and finds in it a means for the integral development of the person. This line of thought is in fact common to all of the papal discourses, whether those that pinpoint sport as a privileged “instrument” for the betterment of the person, or, those that seek to protect the human person from deviations in sport that involve ends that are merely consumerist, materialistic, or even abusive to the body. The goal then is to awaken by means of a sport that is ever more attentive and responsible, a consciousness of the value of the body in reference to the complete fulfilment of oneself in light of salvation. That is, it seeks to take into consideration both the bodily dimension while at the same time being attentive to the promptings of the spirit and above that these are two components that constitute one and the same person.<sup>18</sup> It is precisely because of this, that the Church tends to include sporting activity as an integral part of its pedagogical program.

The primary objective is not simply to foster sports activities for their own sake, but to provide the conditions for building integral characters who can face the drama of life. In fact, when viewed with a moral perspective, life becomes a competition, a fight and a challenge. In this sense, the teachings of the Magisterium reveal an educative potential of sport that gradually develops in the very practice of this activity. This potential is further verified in their positive behaviour and the fostering of criteria aimed at the development of the subject’s personality in accordance with their individual freedom.

### *Sport in a society of deep-seated changes*

The sportsman pope, John Paul II, magnificently elevated sport to a level that was never before considered by the Church. For this much venerated Pontiff, sport had become a “sign of the times”. By assigning sport this special category used during the Vatican II Council, he credits sport with a value of important significance in the promotion of the person and opened the door to subsequent reflection in the relationship between sport and spirituality. “In recent years [sport] has continued to

<sup>16</sup> PIUS XII, *Address to participants of the Italian National Scientific Congress for Sport and Physical Education*, November 8, 1952. English translation from R. FEENEY, *op.cit.* 45.

<sup>17</sup> PAUL VI, *Address to the International Olympic Committee*, April 22, 1966 [our translation]. Original text found in “Insegnamenti di Paolo VI” IV (1966), 206.

<sup>18</sup> See PIUS XII, *Address to the Italian Sports Centre*, October 9, 1955 in “Discorsi e radiomessaggi di Pio XII” XVII (1955), 279-283.

grow even more as one of the characteristic phenomena of the modern era, almost a "sign of the times" capable of interpreting humanity's new needs and new expectations".<sup>19</sup> By placing sport in the category of a phenomenon of the modern era, the Pope also recognizes its cultural and civil value. In this way, sport conveys a meaning that exceeds the mere practice of sport, in as much as it is capable of interpreting life and giving it new meaning in relation to the mystery of the human person. Consequently, the spiritual dimension of sport is fully recovered not as something added on to sport from the outside, but rather, as an intrinsic quality that the sports person manifests in and through the visible gestures of sport.

On the other hand, the global and cultural dimension of sport reveals a new perspective that entails new consequences for human interaction as well as with respect to the many functions inherent to it. Sport, with a language composed of physical gestures that are universally comprehended, crosses over national barriers and constitutes a common denominator that is capable of uniting the entire human community. Because of this, John Paul II urged those involved in this activity "to make sports an opportunity for meeting and dialogue, over and above every barrier of language, race or culture...". He went on to point out that "Sports, in fact, can make an effective contribution to peaceful understanding between peoples and to establishing the new civilization of love".<sup>20</sup>

Such indications on the part of the Magisterium requires us to seek a deeper understanding of the new global dimension of sport and the consequent openness on the part of the Church to these phenomena. This demands careful observation in order to discover the opportunities that present themselves when one contemplates the complex "galaxy" that sport creates. It demands that we look beyond sport itself, to that which it represents symbolically, and to the opportunities that spring up around sport and as a consequence of it. In this way, the intuition that sport is a cultural phenomenon and an event rich in symbolism and new significance that is valid for the entire world, clearly stands out and calls for a new response. In fact, it calls for a "rethinking of a "philosophy" of sport that is adequate for today's multiethnic, multicultural society in the midst of globalization.

Because of this, sport needs a time of conversion. It needs to rediscover itself by means of the exercise of an ongoing spiritual and cultural self-analysis. The essential lines laid out by the pontiffs are directed towards the recovery of a "soul" in sport that can reactivate the mental and spiritual dimensions of the athlete and render sport more capable of realizing its prominent role of transforming society. Here the words of John Paul II assume a prophetic tone as well as mark a path to follow: "Sport, without losing its true nature, can answer the needs of our time: sport that protects the weak and excludes no one, that frees young people from the snares of apathy and indifference, and arouses a healthy sense of competition in them; sport that is a factor of emancipation for poorer countries and helps to eradicate intolerance and build a more fraternal and united world; sport which contributes to the love of life, teaches sacrifice, respect and responsibility, leading to the full development of every human person".<sup>21</sup>

The deeper meaning that emerges from the words of the Pontiff shed light on a double challenge that faces sport. On one hand, there is the task of making use of the universally recognized potential of sport in all its facets to build a more just and fraternal society. On the other hand, lies the task of safeguarding a sport that is rich in human values and determined to reform itself so as to better respond to the integral well being of the person. In a world of profound change, and in need of values and meaning, these are two very concrete tasks that form the basis of a renovated ethical

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<sup>19</sup>JOHN PAUL II, *Homily at the Jubilee for the World of Sports: Even the greatest champions need Christ*, October 29, 2000, "L'Osservatore Romano" Weekly English Edition, n. 44, November 1, 2000, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

program for the entire sport system. Here, each and every sports person, organism, and institution have their own proper and specific responsibility that they must carry out to the degree in which they bear a social and cultural relevance on sport.

### *Conclusion*

Throughout the twentieth century, the consistent teaching of the Pontiffs regarding sport has come to form a complex vision that can be synthetically outlined in three phases: the first is the identification of the ethical content in the practice of sport; the second phase, consequently, is that of specifying the inherent and constitutive criteria used in forming and educating the person by means of sporting activity; and lastly, that which directly involves the mission of the Church, the exploration of the multiple ways in which sport can be a vehicle for the proclamation of the gospel.

The Magisterium, while it does not enter into the specific questions of each singular sport's discipline, it nonetheless seeks to point out the opportunities and the potential within sport to contribute to the ongoing project of the integral development of the person, to promote the good example of champions, and to reflect on the role of sport within a society that has ever more global horizons. In conclusion, we can affirm that the "corpus" of papal discourses offers the nucleus for a vision of sport that values sporting activity in all of its complexity and in its totality, whether in the natural order, or in the light of the "history of salvation".

In synthesis, the Church seeks to give proper meaning to the physical dimension of sport, revealing its "humanizing" function. Above all, it seeks to favor sport's potential to elevate the person while at the same time pointing out that it has its limits and must be at the service of God and remain relative to the other higher values and to the superior destiny of the human person.

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE BOLOGNA SOCCER TEAM****9 December 1978**

Dear young sportsmen!

I am particularly happy to receive you and bid a cordial welcome to you, players of the Bologna football team, to your directors and to the members of your families, who have wished to take part in this happy meeting.

I am grateful to you for your presence which recalls to my mind unforgettable memories of the years spent with young sport-lovers, with whom I have experienced moments charged with human and spiritual joy.

You know how the young are the object of the predilection of the Church and of the Pope, who loves to meet them in order to give and receive enthusiasm and strength, but you young sportsmen have a special place, because you offer, in a preeminent way, a spectacle of fortitude, loyalty and self-control, and also because you have to a marked extent the sense of honour, friendship and brotherly solidarity: virtues which the Church promotes and exalts.

Continue, dear young men, to give the best of yourselves in sports competitions, always remembering that the competitive spirit of the sportsman, though so noble in itself, must not be an end in itself, but must be subordinated to the far more noble requirements of the spirit. Therefore, while I repeat to you: be good sportsmen, I also say to you: be good citizens in family and social life, and, even more, be good Christians, who are able to give a superior meaning to life, in such a way as to be able to put into practice what the Apostle Paul said about athletes to Christians of his time: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it ... They (athletes) do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (1 Cor 9:24-25).

With these sentiments, I express to you all my greeting and my encouragement, which I wish to confirm with a special Blessing.

**ADDRESS TO THE DIRECTORS AND PLAYERS OF THE ITALIAN SOCCER TEAM  
MILAN**

**May 12, 1979**

Dear Soccer players of Milan!

Your visit is an occasion of great joy. It offers me an encounter with young athletes who, on the very eve of their last game of the year, and with the championship of Italy 1979 already in hand, have wished to pay homage to the Pope in order to also give a moral and spiritual significance to the victory that you are about to celebrate. I cordially greet you, dear young people, and I thank you for your visit, together with your president, your director, and your coach.

In seeing you, I cannot help but express once again my profound love for all sportspeople and for sport itself in its many forms, together with the esteem that the Church has for this noble human activity. The Church, as you well know, admires, approves, and encourages sport, seeing in this a certain reflection of a gymnasium of the body and of the spirit, training in social relations that are founded upon mutual respect for the person, and an element of social cohesion that favors the friendly gathering of persons on an international level. The dignity of sport is exalted in the degree in that its practice is inspired by healthy principles that exclude all unnecessary risks on the part of the athlete, and the disordered emotions on the part of the fans that may occur in competition.

I believe that we do not err to recognize in you this potential for civic and Christian virtues. In a world in which we often painfully recognize the presence of youth who are lifeless, marked by sadness and negative experiences, you can be for them, wise friends, expert guides and coaches, not only on the playing field, but also along those paths that lead to a finish line of the true values of life.

In this way you add many spiritual goods to the human satisfaction that comes from the sporting effort, thus offering to society the precious contribution of a healthy morality. In this way, you also give to the Church the joy of seeing in you young men who are strong and capable of resisting evil (cf. 1Gv 2:14).

My dear brothers, these then, are the sentiments that your exuberant youthfulness has stirred in my soul. May the Lord Jesus grant you that "goal", the ultimate finish, which is the true and ultimate destiny of your lives. May my Blessing which I cordially extend to all of you and your families and friends, sustain you in reaching this goal.

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO MEMBERS OF  
THE ITALIAN AND ARGENTINE NATIONAL SOCCER TEAMS May 25, 1979**

Dear Gentlemen and sons!

I am very grateful for this visit, which permits me to greet the prestigious champions from two countries which are profoundly united by their faith, their culture, and natural descendents, along with the coaching staff and family members. Even if these two young teams are not yet as well known as their former colleagues were, you certainly strive to imitate their passion for sport and their generous enthusiasm. I extend to all my cordial greeting.

With interest I have listened to the introductory remarks made by the President of the Italian Federation "Giuoco Calcio", in which his benevolent words were able to appropriately express our common sentiments and aptly recalled the interest the Church has always given to the exercise of the various athletic disciplines. At the same time, he was also able to underline the appreciation for the values connected with the practice of sport that I have also had the opportunity of pointing out on various occasions.

I am glad to perceive with what clarity and precision you, Mr. President, have received this teaching of the Church's Magisterium in this matter. It is certainly an important teaching as it reflects one of the fundamental points of the Christian vision of the person. Regarding this, it is good to recall that already in the first centuries, Christian thinkers, with little biblical data, affirmed the unity of the human person, and vigorously opposed a certain ideology, then in vogue, that was characterized by a clear devaluation of the body, and misguided by an erroneous over exaltation of the spirit. 'What is man- asked an author of the end of the 2nd century or beginning of the 3rd – what is man, is not a rational animal composed of a soul and of a body? The soul, then, taken by itself, is not then, a man? No, this is the soul of a man. Then is the body a man? No, but it must be said that this is the body of a man. Because of this, neither the soul, nor the body, on their own, is a man, but rather, he who we call by this name is that which is born from the union of these' (*De Resurrectione*, VIII: Rouet de Journal, *Enchiridion Patristicum*, n. 147, p. 59). Thus, when the Christian thinker of this century, Emanuel Mounier says that man is 'a body in the same way that he is spirit: entirely body and entirely spirit' (cf. E. Mounier, *Il Personalismo*, Roma 1971, p. 29), he is not saying anything new, but simply restating the traditional thought of the Church.

I have wished to underline this point because it is the keystone upon which rests the evaluation which the Magisterium gives to the discipline of sport. This is a highly positive evaluation in light of the contribution that these disciplines make towards ones integral human formation. Athletic activity, in fact, when practiced in the right way, tends to develop strength, proficiency, resistance, and harmony, while favoring at the same time interior growth, becoming a school of loyalty, courage, endurance, tenacity, and brotherhood.

In directing then, words of praise and encouragement to you, young athletes here present and to your colleagues through the world, to your coaches and trainers, and all who are dedicated to promoting a healthy practice of sport, I express my desire that those who temper the body and the spirit through the demanding norms of the various sports disciplines be ever more numerous, and that you make the effort to acquire the human maturity necessary to stand up to the challenges of life, learning to face the difficulties of each day with courage and to overcome them victoriously.

**SPORT, A SCHOOL OF HUMAN VIRTUE**

Address to 23<sup>rd</sup> Water-skiing Championship of Europe, Africa and the Mediterranean

**August 31, 1979**

Gentlemen, beloved brothers:

While I thank you heartily for the kind and noble words just addressed to me by the President of the Italian National Olympic Committee, I express to you my sincere satisfaction at receiving you today in this house, so near the place in which your sports competitions are taking place. I am grateful to you for having requested this meeting, which is highly appreciated also on my side. Therefore, I greet you all cordially and without making distinctions, from whatever nation you come.

The 23rd Water-skiing Championship of Europe, Africa and the Mediterranean is an excellent further opportunity for rapprochement and fraternization among different peoples. The sport you practice is certainly an extraordinary and attractive one; but beyond its competitive and even aesthetic aspects, it is always, like any other really sporting activity, a factor of human ennoblement: both in the individual sense, since it educates to a wholesome self-discipline, and in the interpersonal sense, since it promotes meeting, agreement and, in a word, mutual fellowship. And when it is practiced at the international level, then it becomes a propitious element to overcome multiple barriers, in such a way as to reveal and strengthen the unity of the human family, beyond all differences of race, culture, politics or religion.

In these times, in which, unfortunately, various forms of violence and therefore of hatred tend unhappily to rend the tissue of social solidarity, you contribute, on your side, to bearing a luminous witness of cohesion, peace and union, in a word of "getting on together." The necessary competition far from being a motive of division, is seen, on the contrary, to be a positive factor of dynamic emulation, possible only in a framework of mutual relations accepted, measured and promoted.

Precisely because your competing does not take place for the sake of mere and superficial amusement, but to give proof of your ability and of what fruits a long and arduous preparation may yield, sporting effort is a real school of true human virtue, of which the ancient biblical book of Wisdom writes: "When it is present, men imitate it, and they long for it when it has gone, and throughout all time it marches crowned in triumph, victor in the contest for prizes that are undefiled" (4:2).

In sport, in fact, virtue is victorious; and so everyone is victorious, since everyone benefits from its fruitful individual and community requirements.

At this point, I express my cordial good wishes, in view of the forthcoming Olympic games, for excellent sporting results, so that from your athletic competitions there may emerge victorious simply man, in his highest values of loyalty, mutual respect, generosity and beauty.

And from almighty and blessed God I invoke abundant graces on you all, on your families, and on your associations.

## **SPORT AS TRAINING GROUND FOR VIRTUE AND INSTRUMENT OF UNION AMONG PEOPLE**

**Address to the presidents of the Italian Sports Federations December 20, 1979**

Gentlemen,

It is with deep joy and sincere satisfaction that, as you wished, I talk to you this morning, Presidents of the Italian Sports Federations, gathered in Rome for the meeting of the Council of the National Olympic Committee.

While I thank your President warmly for the noble and kind words addressed to me, which illustrated well the interest of the Church in the delicate activity you carry out, I am happy to address to each of you, to the two hundred thousand leaders and the six million young people who practice in the ranks of your various federations, my cordial greeting, my good wishes, and the expression of my personal interest.

Aware of your responsibilities, which, for some of you, also reach the international level, to the rightful satisfaction of those who operate within the praiseworthy institution of CONI, I appreciate your visit all the more, because I know you are engaged at present in study of the problems connected with participation in the next Olympic Games, which we hope will be the recurrent, awaited and special occasion to confirm and highlight more and more the values of sport understood rightly and practiced serenely.

My esteem for your commitment becomes all the greater if I think that it concerns not only the preparation of athletes and programs for sporting activities of a highly competitive character, such as the ones mentioned above, but also, and mainly, the provision of adequate structures for the large youthful population of Italy, to exercise wholesome physical activity, within reach of all those who wish to avail themselves of them.

This interest of mine for your service, while it may be confirmed as has been delicately hinted-by my personal experience and by an elective propensity, is based fundamentally on an objective examination of the values highlighted by sporting activity, as the Magisterium of my venerated Predecessors has so often emphasized in the documents and addresses.

The Church has always been interested in the problem of sport, because she prizes everything that contributes constructively to the harmonious and complete development of man, body and soul. She encourages, therefore, what aims at educating, developing and strengthening the human body, in order that it may offer a better service for the attainment of personal maturation.

The body, according to Christian concept, deserves due interest, real respect, loving and wise care, invested as it is with natural dignity, capable of a mysterious sacrality and destined to ultimate victory over death itself, as our faith teaches us. I like to repeat with St. Paul: "Glorify God in your body" (cf 1 Cor 6:20).

Certainly, the value of the body must be supported and pursued in respect of the hierarchy of the higher moral and spiritual values, which, sometimes, require sacrifice of physical life itself, in order to affirm the absolute primacy of the spirit, of the soul, created in the likeness of God, reborn to new life by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, and called to the imperishable wreath, alter the happy accomplishment of the earthly competition (cf. 1 Cor 9:24-25).

Practiced in this outlook, sport has in itself an important moral and educative significance: it is a training ground of virtue, a school of inner balance and outer control, an introduction to more true and lasting conquests. "Physical effort -Pius XII of venerated memory said wisely- thus becomes almost an *ascesis* of human and Christian virtues; such, in fact, it must become and be..., in order that the exercise of sport may transcend itself... and be preserved from materialistic deviations, which would lower its value and nobility" (To the National Scientific Congress of Sport, November 8, 1952, Discorsi e Radiomessaggi, XIV, p. 389).

In a social context, which is, unfortunately, in the throes of dehumanizing temptations, such as those of abuse of power and violence, feel that you are in the service of the formation of the young generation, aware-as your President eloquently expressed-that sport, because of the wholesome elements it gives value to and exalts, may become more and more a *vita*) instrument for the moral and spiritual elevation of the human person, and, therefore, contribute to the construction of an orderly, peaceful and hard-working society.

How could I pass over in silence, furthermore, the beneficial influence that the intensification of sporting contacts with other nations can have to strengthen and develop further mutual understanding and the sense of union among peoples? It is for this reason that I look with satisfaction at the succession of peaceful competitions, such as the Olympic ones.

All these perspectives, which I have mentioned, are more than familiar to you. The few words I desired to say to you wish to emphasize the importance I attach to your effort.

Thanking you once more for this kind visit, I formulate the most heartfelt wishes that the work of your National Council may be followed by abundant and lasting fruits and, while I extend to you, to your families and to all sportsmen, cordial wishes for a Merry Christmas, I willingly impart to you my special Apostolic Blessing as a token of the gifts of divine protection.

**HUMAN AND SPORTING QUALITIES MAKE MEN BROTHERS**  
**To the Representatives of the UEFA Meeting In Rome June 20, 1980**

Mr. President,

I thank you heartily for the kind words you have just addressed to me, and I am happy to greet in return at the same time as the President of the International Football Federation, the Representatives of the European Federations, gathered in Rome for their Congress on the occasion of this final phase of the championship of Europe, which is presently taking place in Italy. I bid you all, Ladies and Gentlemen, the most cordial welcome.

Football, whose great competitions you organize, helping to select the players, gives every week, and in nearly all countries, the opportunity for massive gatherings, where so many families, young people-and not so young! .find a healthy entertainment, an interest in the sporting value of the game, and even the emotion of the "fans." It is a social fact that has its importance for the millions of spectators in the stadiums, and now through television. But the importance is even greater for the players, and there I am thinking in the first place, beyond the great teams you sponsor, of the many persons who train for football, from a very early age, for the pleasure of the sport and for amateur competitions. I have been able to appreciate through experience the pleasure and interest of this sport, and I am among those who entourage it.

*Values of Sport*

It is not before you that I need to stress its physical and moral virtues, when it is practiced as it should be; you must be quite convinced about them. Not only does the player find, on the level of the body, the relaxation that he needs, not only does he acquire additional suppleness, skill and endurance, and strengthen his health, but he grows in energy and in the spirit of teamwork. A wholesome competition also develops team spirit and fair play with regard to the opponent, and it widens the human horizon of exchanges and meetings between cities and even at the international level. The unity of Europe, for example -I am speaking of it since you are nearly all from this continent- will not, of course, be brought about around the spherical or oval football, as its problems are set at another level, a very complex one; but sport can certainly contribute to helping the participants get to know one another better, appreciate one another, and experience a certain solidarity beyond frontiers, precisely on the common basis of their same human and sporting qualities.

Yes, like so many other sports, football can elevate man. To do so, it must naturally keep its place in personal, family, and national life, which is a relative one, in order not to lead to neglect of the other great social or religious problems; or other means of developing the values of the body, the spirit, the heart, and the soul thirsting for the absolute. The good that God wants for each one and for society is made up of a well-balanced whole.

Everyone knows very well, moreover, that the values of sport are not automatically assured. Like all human beings, they need to be purified, to be protected. Today, temptations sometimes become very strong to turn sport aside from its specifically human purpose, which is the optimum display of the gifts of the body and, therefore, of the person in a natural competition, beyond all discrimination; the loyal course of sports competitions may even be disturbed, or they may be used for other purposes, with the danger of corruption and decadence.

### *Great responsibilities*

Those who really love sport, but also the whole of society, cannot tolerate such deviations, which are, in fact, regressions with regard to the sporting ideal and the progress of man. There again, the defense of man deserves vigilance and a noble struggle. I hope that here I concur with one of your concerns. It seems to me that that, too, in fact, is part of the framework of the responsibilities incumbent on you at the head of, or within, your European Federations.

I hope that the championships will always take place in a worthy way, in an atmosphere of joy, peace, fair play and friendship. I express my best wishes for your task, and for your teams. (There, I cannot allow myself to be partial before such well-deserving representations! So I will just say: "May the best one win!")

Nor do I forget that you are men and women who have other cares, who have, in particular, a family: may God bless your families, your children! Each of you is also, in the secrecy of his conscience, in relationship with God, who is the author of life and the purpose of our- existence. The Pastor of the Church of Rome hopes, therefore, that this relationship, too, will develop, that God may be your Tight, your hope, and your joy. This is the meaning of the Blessing that I implore upon you, from the bottom of my heart.

### *For the common good*

I would add a word of greeting to all of you in English. Like other sports, football passes over linguistic divisions, to express sentiments of solidarity in fair play. The immense interest of the public in this area of wholesome competition shows that many aspects of the common good are involved in the preparation and organization of the matches themselves. Through your own activities there are many opportunities to serve the total cause of human well-being. In all your contacts with the players and the spectators may you, yourselves, be sustained by the goal of service to the community and service to a fraternal Europe.

In the hope that most of you have already understood my previous words, I would just like to greet you briefly in the German language, which is also officially admitted in the European Football Federation. It is well known to me how many men in your countries are members of a football association. Yes, we can almost be sure to find in every place that has its own church, also a football field. Together with the numerous other associations of your home, this sport can build many kinds of significant ties among men, which can arouse and strengthen the feeling of solidarity in a place or district of a city.

The Catholic Church attributes great value to all such ties and elements of solidarity, provided they do not lead the individual to presumption, but make him attentive to the interests of his neighbor and direct him to constant balance of individual wishes and intentions. In this connection, my blessing willingly goes to you and your families, sportsmen and all friends of sport whom you represent.

In this meeting with the Leaders of the European Football Federations, I wish to address my cordial thought also to all football players, who are the protagonists of this sport, so popular and at the same time, so fascinating. My affectionate greeting goes to them, together with the wish that, always aware of the responsibilities they have with regard to their vast public supporters and fans, they will always give a clear example of those human and Christian virtues that must emerge from their behavior: loyalty, correctness, sincerity, honesty, respect for others, fortitude, and solidarity.

**ADDRESS TO PARTICIPANTS OF THE 12TH ITALIAN YOUTH GAMES****October 2, 1980**

Dear representatives of the sports federations of the Italian National Olympic Committee, Dear boys and girls!

I especially appreciate this visit at the end of the National Youth Games which were held in Rome in these days. I am pleased to see all of you and to welcome you. Thank you for thinking of me with this kind gesture of visiting me before returning to your homes and to the various regions of Italy from which you have come and which you have represented so well. I also wish to express my gratitude to Mr. Franco Carraro, president of the Italian National Olympic Committee, for the thoughtful words he addressed to me on behalf of all of you.

Your enthusiastic and festive presence invokes in my mind so many dear memories of my previous pastoral experiences among the youth athletes of Poland. You know well the esteem the Church has for you and know that the Christian faith does not belittle sport, but rather, reinforces and dignifies its various expressions.

You also know the interest with which I follow your athletic activities and with what satisfaction I watch your sporting performances in which reveal the uncommon qualities of fortitude, discipline and bravery, with which the Lord has blessed you. Your President has just spoken about your training in "loyalty", in "self-discipline", in "courage", in "generosity", in "cooperation" and in "fraternity". Indeed, are not these also goals to which the Church strives for in her efforts to educate and form the youth? Are not these also the requirements and the deepest demands of the Gospel message?

In this regard, and I urge you to always give the best of your energy and skill in peaceful sportive competition. At the same time, I remind you to not use sport only as an end in itself, but rather as a valuable asset that may help you to enrich your personal development with that fullness that comes from the integration of both your physical and spiritual talents. In a word, the body must be subordinated to the spirit which gives light, breath and sprint to life, and makes you good athletes, good citizens and good Christians.

Dear young people, today's meeting with you takes place at a particularly important moment for the life of the Church. Many of you might know that numerous bishops from all over the world have gathered in the Vatican to participate in the Fifth Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the tasks of the Christian Family in the Modern World. It is more urgent than ever to reattribute that beauty to all Christian families that is the fullness of love, and all those virtues that have been stressed by our Lord. It is necessary that the family be a privileged gymnasium where your spiritual, sportive and social ideals will find a favorable atmosphere and the impetus necessary to develop them to their full maturity. I encourage you to add your own personal effort so that your family will become a true school of spiritual strength and training for greater human and social achievements.

As a token of benevolence in as much as it can be of assistance and encouragement, I cordially impart on you here present, to your local sports associations, to your loved ones and to those members of the National Olympic Committee, my Apostolic Blessing.

**ADDRESS TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL GAMES FOR DISABLED PERSONS****April 3, 1981**

Dear brothers and sisters,

1. I am happy to have this opportunity to meet you, and I am pleased that the Second International Games for Disabled Persons, "Roma 81", has brought you together. The games for which you have come show clearly and effectively that handicapped persons can be and are fully integrated into social life. They show that you live a full life and share in its joys. Sport for you is not a matter of economic interest. You have not come to set up new absolute records in the various branches of athletics. However, your participation in sport sets up a record that from many points of view is far more important: a record of surpassing yourselves, a record of universal brotherhood through sport and of practising solidarity with all members of the human family.
2. I therefore congratulate all who were involved in organizing the games. They include the International Stoke Mandeville Games and the International Sport Organization for the Disabled, the Italian National Olympic Committee, the Federazione Italiana Sport Handicappati, and the authorities of the Region of Lazio and of the Province and City of Rome. My congratulations also go to the organizers and participants in the scientific congress being held in conjunction with the games and dealing with medical, juridical and technical problems of the disabled. I congratulate you all for offering assistance to the disabled, for opening up for them possibilities of improving their lives, and for giving them hope.
3. I am glad to note that greater sensitivity is now being shown with regard to the needs of the handicapped. What gives rise to this sensitivity and sustains it is greater awareness of the value and dignity of the human person, which do not depend on secondary qualities such as strength and physical appearance but on the fundamental fact that he or she is a person, a human being.
4. With this goes awareness of the duty of solidarity with all members of the human family, who have a right to be integrated into the different forms of the life of society. Accordingly, we must endeavour to put an end to discrimination, not only by one race against another, but also by the strong and healthy against the weak and sick. In a document issued earlier this month the Holy See has stressed the basic principles concerning the disabled, who are full human subjects, with the corresponding rights, and must be helped, in accordance with the principles of integration, normalization and personalization, to take their place in society in all aspects and at all levels, as far as is compatible with their capabilities.
5. It is important that the greater awareness and sensitivity now existing should be embodied in appropriate legislation and that those who are active in the fields of medicine, psychology, sociology and education should foster the full integration of the handicapped person into society. But it is no less important that there should be a change of heart, a conversion, on the part of every citizen and every group in society, so that they may willingly and fraternally accept the presence of handicapped persons at school, at work and in every activity, including sport.
6. Handicapped persons play an important part in creating a new civilization, the civilization of love, by removing social barriers and bringing in new values, the values not of force but of humanity.

7. In Jesus Christ there is an important message for all the disabled, and for those who serve the disabled, and for society as a whole in its relations with them. Jesus Christ brought us a message that has emphasized the absolute value of life and of the human person, who comes from God and is called to live in communion with God. The same message can be read in his own life of love for the sick and suffering, and of service to them. The message also comes from the words with which he identified himself with all those in need and indicated that his disciples should be known for their loving service of the poor and the weak: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me"(Matth. 25, 40). I pray that his message will be heard, and that fresh hope will be given to the disabled, and that new love will permeate all society.

**ADDRESS TO THE ATHLETES OF THE ITALIAN "YOUTH GAMES"****October 11, 1981**

Dear young athletes!

1. I am happy to welcome you and cordially greet you, along with the Leaders of the Italian National Olympic Committee who have accompanied you, at the end of the national "Youth Games" competitions, to give you the opportunity to express here, also on behalf of your colleagues belonging to all the regions of Italy, the sentiments of your Christian faith and your youthful joy. I address my warm thanks to Dr. Franco Carraro, your President, for the kind words with which he has introduced this informal meeting.

2. Your presence gives me joy not only because of the spectacle of stupendous youth that you offer to my gaze, but also because of the physical and moral values you represent. Sport, in fact, even under the aspect of physical education, finds in the Church support for all its good and wholesome elements. For the Church cannot but encourage everything that serves the harmonious development of the human body, rightly considered the masterpiece of the whole of creation, not only because of its proportion, vigor, and beauty, but also and especially because God has made it his dwelling and the instrument of an immortal soul, breathing into it that "breath of life" (c1. Gen. 2:7) by which man is made in his image and likeness. If we then consider the supernatural aspect, St. Paul's words are an illuminating admonition: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:15; 19-20).

3. These are beloved young people, some features of what Revelation teaches us about the greatness and dignity of the human body, created by God and redeemed by Christ. For this reason, the Church does not cease to recommend the best use of this marvelous instrument by a suitable physical education which, while it avoids on the one hand the deviations of body worship, on the other hand it trains both body and spirit for effort, courage, balance, sacrifice, nobility, brotherhood, courtesy, and, in a word, fair play. If practiced in this way, sport will help you above all to become citizens who love social order and peace; it will teach you to see in sports competitions not struggles between rivals, not factors of division, but peaceful sporting events in which sense of respect for the competitor must never be lacking, even in the rightful effort to achieve victory.

With these thoughts and with these wishes, I very willingly impart to you, to members of your families, and to your friends, my special Apostolic Blessing, as a token of abundant heavenly graces and as a sign of my favor.

**JUBILEE YEAR OF THE REDEEMER HOMILY GIVEN AT THE OLYMPIC STADIUM IN ROME**

**April 12, 1984**

1. This extraordinary Holy Year would not have been complete without the witness of faith shown also by those involved in the world of sport, that human and social phenomenon which has such importance and influence on people's way of acting and thinking today. So it is a great joy for me to be with you, men and women devoted to sport, in order to celebrate the Jubilee of the Redemption accomplished by Christ through his Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

St. Paul, who had been acquainted with the sporting world of his day, in the first Letter to the Corinthians, which we have just listened to, writes to those Christians living in the Greek world: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it!" (1 Cor 9:24).

Here we see that the Apostle of the Gentiles, in order to bring the message of Christ to all peoples, drew from all the concepts, images, terminologies, modes of expression, and philosophical and literary references not only of the Jewish tradition but also of Hellenic culture. And he did not hesitate to include sport among the human values which he used as points of support and reference for dialogue with the people of his time. Thus he recognized the fundamental *validity of sport*, considering it not just as a term of comparison to illustrate a higher ethical and aesthetic ideal, but also in its intrinsic reality as a factor in the formation of man and as a part of his culture and his civilization. In this way St. Paul, continuing the teaching of Jesus, established the Christian attitude towards this as towards the other expressions of man's natural faculties such as science, learning, work, art, love, and social and political commitment. Not an attitude of rejection or flight, but one of respect, esteem, even though correcting and elevating them: in a word, an attitude of redemption.

*Positive values*

2. And it is precisely this idea of Christianity accepting, adopting, perfecting, and elevating human values - and thus as a hymn to life - which I would like to pass on today to you and to all those who in whatever way and in every country of the world practice or are interested in this human activity called sport.

The Jubilee sheds the light of the Redemption also on this human and social phenomenon, exalting and emphasizing its positive values. We cannot ignore the fact that in this field too, unfortunately, there are certain negative or at least questionable aspects which today are rightly analyzed and criticized by experts in the study of customs and behavior, aspects which undoubtedly cause suffering to yourselves.

But we also know what great efforts have been made to ensure that the "philosophy of sport" always prevails, the key principle of which is not "sport for sport's sake" or other motives than the dignity, freedom, and integral development of man! You yourselves, in the *Sportsmen's Manifesto* that you have launched for this Jubilee, solemnly state that "sport is at the service of man and not man at the service of sport, and therefore the dignity of the human person is the goal and criterion of all sporting activity...Sport is sincere and generous confrontation, a meeting place, a bond of solidarity and friendship...Sport can be genuine culture when the setting in which it is practiced and the experience it brings are open and sensitive to human and universal values for the balanced development of man in all his dimensions." And you also say that sport, "by reason of its universal

nature, has a place on the international level as a means of brotherhood and peace," and that you wish to commit yourselves to ensuring that it "is for individuals and for the world an effective instrument of reconciliation and peace!"

### *Sincere fraternity*

3. Yes, dear athletes, may this truly extraordinary meeting revive within you the awareness of the need to commit yourselves so that sport contributes to making mutual love, sincere fraternity, and authentic solidarity penetrate society. For sport can make a valid and fruitful contribution to the peaceful co-existence of all peoples, above and beyond every discrimination of race, language, and nations.

According to the Olympic Charter, which sees sport as the occasion of "a better mutual understanding and friendship for the building of a better and more peaceful world," let your meetings be a symbolic sign for the whole of society and a prelude to that new age in which nations "shall not lift up sword against nation" (Is 2:4). Society looks to you with confidence and is grateful to you for your witness to the ideals of peaceful civil and social living together for the building up of a new civilization founded on love, solidarity, and peace. These ideals do honor to the men and women of sport who have worked them out and proclaimed them, but in a special way they do honor to the numerous champions - some of whom are here today - who in their careers have lived and achieved these ideals with exemplary commitment!

### *Temple of the spirit*

4. In the passage that we have listened to, St. Paul also emphasized the interior and spiritual significance of sport: "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things" (1 Cor. 9:25). This recognizes the healthy dose of balance, self-discipline, sobriety, and therefore, in a word, of virtue, which is implied in the practice of sport.

To be a good sportsman, one must have honesty with oneself and with others, loyalty, moral strength (over and above physical strength), perseverance, a spirit of collaboration and sociability, generosity, broadness of outlook and attitude, and ability to live in harmony with others and to share: all these requirements belong to the moral order: but St. Paul adds straight afterwards, "They (namely the athletes in the Greek and Roman stadiums) do it to receive a perishable wrath (that is, an earthly, passing, fleeting glory and reward, even when it evokes the delirium of the crowd), but we an imperishable" (1 Cor 9:25).

In these words, we find the elements for outlining not only anthropology but an ethic and also a theology of sport which highlights all its value. In the first place, sport is making good use of the body, an effort to reaching optimum physical condition, which brings marked consequences of psychological well-being. From our Christian faith we know that, through baptism, the human person, in his or her totality and integrity of soul and body, becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own, you were bought with a price (that is, with the blood of Christ the Redeemer). So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:19- 20).

Sport is competitiveness, a contest for winning a crown, a cup, a title, a first place. But from the Christian faith, we know that the "imperishable crown," the "eternal life" which is received from God as a gift but which is also the goal of a daily victory in the practice of virtue is much more valuable. And if this is a really important form of striving, again according to St. Paul it is this: "But earnestly desire the higher gifts" (1 Cor 12:31), which means the gifts that best serve the growth of

the Kingdom of God in yourselves and in the world!

Sport is the joy of life, a game, a celebration, and as such it must be properly used and perhaps, today, freed from excess technical perfection and professionalism, through a recovery of its free nature, its ability to strengthen bonds of friendship, to foster dialogue and openness to others, as an expression of the richness of being, much more valid and to be prized than having, and hence far above the harsh laws of production and consumption and all other purely utilitarian and hedonistic considerations in life.

### *Gospel of love*

5. All of this, dear friends, reaches its fullness in the Gospel of love, which we have heard proclaimed through the words of Jesus, quoted by St. John, and which is summed up in the single commandment: Love! Jesus insists: "Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love..." "These things I have spoken to you, and that your joy may be full..." "This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you... You are my friends if you do what I command you..." "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide." "This I command you, to love one another" (Jn 15:9-17).

On an occasion as unique and significant as this meeting of ours today, I wish to pass on to all of you, and especially to the youngsters, this message, this appeal, this commandment of Christ: Love! Love one another! Abide in the love of Christ and open up your hearts to one another! This is the secret of life, and also the deepest and most authentic dimension of sport!

To all of you I wish to say further: In this age which is so marvelous and so tormented, strive to build a culture of love, a civilization of love! You can contribute to this by sport and by your whole behavior, by all the freshness of your feelings, and by all the seriousness of the discipline which sport can teach you. Live as people who stay friends and brothers and sisters even when you compete for the "crown" of an earthly victor! Shake hands, join your hearts in the solidarity of love and limitless cooperation! Recognize in yourselves, in each other, the sign of the Fatherhood of God and the fraternity in Christ!

I trust in the sincerity of your faith and your willingness; I trust in your youth; I trust in your determination to strive beyond the world of sport, for the salvation of modern man, for the coming of those "new heavens" and that "new earth" (2 Pt 3:13) for which all of us are yearning with the ardor of Christian hope. I feel that the Church, no less than your homelands, can count on you!

You have models to inspire you. I am thinking, for example, of Pier Giorgio Frassati, who as a modern young man open to the values of sport - he was a skillful mountaineer and able skier - but at the same time he bore a courageous witness of generosity in Christian faith and charity towards others, especially the very poor and the suffering. The Lord called him to himself at only 24 years of age, in August 1925, but he is still very much alive among us with his smile and his goodness, inviting his contemporaries to the love of Christ and a virtuous life. After the First World War, he wrote the following: "Through charity, peace is sown among people; not the peace that the world gives but the true peace that only faith in Christ can give us, making us brothers and sisters." These words of his, and his spiritual friendship, I leave with you as a program, so that in every part of the world you too may be messengers of the true peace of Christ!

I hope that you will walk towards the future with that "new heart" which each of you will have been able to achieve in this Jubilee of the Redemption, as a gift of grace and a victory of love!

**TELEGRAM TO CARDINAL MANNING ON OCCASION OF THE  
OLYMPIC GAMES**

**L'Osservatore Romano Weekly English Edition, N.32 August 6, 1984, 2.**

On the occasion of the solemn opening of the Twenty-third International Olympic Games taking place in Los Angeles I ask you to convey my cordial greetings and good wishes to all the organizers, participants and spectators.

This great event has significance not only for the world of sport as the expression of friendly athletic competition and the striving for human excellence but also for the future of the human community, which through sport gives external expression to the desire of all for the universal cooperation and understanding.

I offer my heartiest congratulations to the men and women who are representing their countries and I hope that at this worldwide encounter they will be worthy models of peaceful harmony and human fellowship. Upon them and upon all connected with the Games I invoke abundant divine blessings.

IOANNES PAULUS II

**ADDRESS TO ITALIAN OLYMPIC MEDAL WINNERS:  
SPORTS OFFERS OPPORTUNITY FOR SPIRITUAL ELEVATION**

**November 24, 1984**

(L'Osservatore Romano Weekly English Edition, N.50 December 10, 1984, 4.)

Beloved Olympic Athletes,

1. I am grateful to you for this visit you have wished to pay to me on the occasion of your meeting in Rome, sponsored by the Administrators of the Lazio Region. I greet each and every one of you: managers and athletes! I thank Mons.Emanuele Clarizio for the cordial words which he has just addressed to me as an expression of the sentiments of all of you.

A few months since the splendid records you set in the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, arousing the just pride not only in athletic circles but of the entire Italian nation, which enthusiastically followed your successes, you offer me the fine opportunity to express to you congratulations and my joy for the skill you demonstrated in those competitions and for the number of medals with which your athletic performances were crowned. And I add fervent wishes for further achievements in your exalting athletic activity.

2. While I express my sincere thanks for this courteous gesture, allow me to offer you during this brief meeting, some considerations that may help you live in depth your commitment that is so thrilling but also arduous. You know well that sports, in all its expressions, before being an athletic exhibition, is a mortal tension. It demands an ideal task. Sport runs the risk of degrading man if it is not based on and supported by the human virtues of loyalty, generosity and respect for the rules of the game as well as respect for the player.

These are virtues that harmonize well with the Christian spirit because they demand a capacity for self-control, self-denial, sacrifice and humility, and therefore an attitude of gratefulness to God, who is the giver of every good and therefore also the giver of the necessary physical and intellectual talents. Sport is not merely the exercise of muscles, but it is the school of mortal values and of training in courage, in perseverance, and in overcoming laziness and carelessness. Besides, it is an antidote for weakness, discouragement and dejection in defeat. There is no doubt that these values are of greatest interest for the formation of a personality which consider sports not an end in itself but as a means to total and harmonious physical, moral, and social development.

3. Your profession as athletes offers you, among other things, also the opportunity to improve your own personal spiritual state. Called as you are frequently to engage in your competitions in the midst of nature, amid the marvels of mountains, seas, fields and slopes, you are in the best position to perceive the value of simple and immediate things, the call to goodness, the dissatisfaction with one's insufficiency, and to mediate on the authentic values that are at the basis of human life.

Discipline too, necessary for engaging in athletic performances, can be considered a prerequisite for spiritual elevation. In fact, it creates a certain type of personal check which every step towards perfection absolutely needs. In this regards the Apostle Paul says:” Athletes deny themselves all sorts of things. They do this to win a crown of leaves that withers, but we a crown that is imperishable. I do not run like a man who loses sight of the finish line. I do not fight as if I were only shadowboxing” (1Cor 9:25-26).

With these words St. Paul instills the necessity not only for a training of muscles but also for a training of the spirit through the exercise of the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance and the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. Beloved young athletes, if you do all this you will be not only excellent athletes but also good Christians and exemplary citizens who can witness to a certain lifestyle both in the sporting arenas and in the environments, even more demanding, of your family and society.

To this end I invoke upon you abundant heavenly favours, while I impart to you the Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to your loved ones.

**SPORTS CAN BECOME INSTRUMENT OF RECONCILIATION AND PEACE**  
**Address to Executives of Italian National Olympic Committee**

**January 17, 1985**

("L'Osservatore Romano" Weekly English Edition N.6, February 11, 1985, 8-9.)

Distinguished Gentleman,

I am happy to greet in you, with sincere cordiality, the executives and leaders of the Italian sports world, daily engaged in the not easy task of spreading the idea and practice of sports throughout the Italian nation.

1. I still have in mind the spectacle of last 12 April in the Olympic stadium, filled with young people gathered there from every part of the world to celebrate the Jubilee of the Redemption. It was one of the most characteristic manifestations of the Holy Year, filled with enthusiasm, hope and faith. On that occasion, I was able to launch a message to all athletes, inviting them to work for the building of a new civilization founded on love solidarity and peace. On the same occasion you, executives of CONI, signed the "Sports Manifesto", pledging to make your own the principles and values contained in it, that athletes might be a real instrument for reconciliation and peace, for man and the world.

Your presence here today is tied with that event. You have requested this visit because, in your desire to spread everywhere your specific contribution of ideas and initiatives, you have accepted and intend to re-launch that appeal during the International Youth Year.

So, while I express to you my strong encouragement in furthering your proposals, I want to express once more my full appreciation for the positive values of sports, understood in its most authentic contents, without its degenerating, as is so very easy, into being considered an end in itself or instrumentalized for party ends.

2. Competitive sports *per se*, because of the effort it requires to achieve ideal physical condition, is above all an enhancement of the body, well-being and care of health. Because of the implicit commitment to sacrifice, tenacity, discipline, self-control, with a view to a concrete prospect of victory, it is a training of the will, a constant school of human formation and personal in maturity. In addition, sports, which is certainly engagement under the form of competition, also provides training in the spirit of collaboration, solidarity, loyalty, sincerity, brotherhood and is a gymnasium for the human virtues which are at the base for civil living; in short, the practice of sport is a school for social education.

Dating from the time of the first Olympic contests in ancient Greece, sports has contributed to nourishing love for one's country and keeping alive the bonds of distant citizens with their own land. And today, having become a phenomenon on an international level, because of the frequent opportunities for encounters between peoples of various backgrounds, it is a coefficient of friendship without boundaries, of coexistence beyond languages, of harmony in the name of common values, and a sure element of universal peacemaking.

Precisely in anticipation of the International Youth Year, while celebrating the XVIII World Day of Peace, I intended to emphasize the binominal peace and youth: "Peace and Youth Go Forward Together". Young people want to be, and rightly so, the protagonists of the future and the builders of

a new civilization based on brotherly solidarity. Well, they already have at hand one of the most valid and convincing instruments. Sports, mostly practiced by young people, constitute no negligible factor of peace in building the new society.

3. I am anxious to add quickly, however, that the undertaking will become easier and more effective if there is an adequate increase in the number of young protagonists able to live even higher values and able to introduce a sincerely spiritual commitment into their athletic activities.

Then, besides being a factor of human and social education, athletic competition will become the practice of Christian virtues, a school of religious education, or rather the education of man in his totality. Linked to the prospect of setting ever new and more ambitious records, which subjects physical capacities to the effort of attaining optimal conditions, is the interior joy of glorifying God in the body as St. Paul expresses it (cf. 1Cor 6:20).

Then, with man's development the maturity of believers is also attained. And life, enriched by supernatural values, becomes a response to God's plan and worthy of being lived to the full. In this way, the gift of youth, which is both the hope and the foundation for a better civilization, is offered to modern society.

With these hopes and my best wishes for a good year, I renew my cordial greeting, accompanied by Blessing.

## ADDRESS TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE EUROPEAN GAMES FOR THE BLIND

September 14, 1985

Mr. President of the Organizing Committee for the European Games for the Blind, dear young athletes, and all you who have accompanied them – organizers and assistants of this international meeting!

1. I welcome you to this meeting which gives me joy and at the same time moves me. I received with pleasure your request to be able to visit me during your stay in Rome. It is primarily with the eyes of the spirit that we look upon one another, and that intensifies the meaning of this audience, increasing with emotion our common affection and spontaneous friendship.

2. In the posters advertising your games, I noticed these words, which struck me profoundly: “Not seeing does not mean not loving; not seeing does not mean closing in upon oneself; not seeing does not mean failure to enjoy the beautiful things of life; not seeing does not mean the inability to participate in sports”. These words are a message to all who are blind, a powerful reminder rich in hope, but they are just as much a warning which commits all the sighted who enter into contact with you in the varied circumstances of daily life.

These are serious words, because they appeal to everyone who has the gift of health, of sight, of efficiency, to understand that within every man or woman suffering from some sort of physical defect, there is always a human person; there is a human heart, with all the riches of an individuality which must not only be respected, but helped to develop itself according to its own gifts and inclinations, for the person’s own good and to the advantage of the entire community.

Such words rightly affirm that even though you do not see, you have developed the other sensory capacities in such a way that, far from being precluded from human relations, you open yourselves to a contact with others that is in certain respects more profound and intense. The more attentive perception of stimuli that come to you from the outside world, particularly the refinement of the sense of hearing, permits you to grasp the deepest nuances of a discourse. It also makes you experts in the value of sounds for a sense of direction and the knowledge of the surrounding environment. The games in which you are participating are proof of this, and demonstrate in an excellent way the goals which you are capable of attaining.

3. Dear young athletes and those accompanying you, I greet you today with great affection. Although your sporting activities are very surprising to people not accustomed to attending them, they have a very deep meaning: they are a sign of your great human capabilities. You do not allow yourselves to be overcome by difficulties, but are determined to conquer them. In this you show courage and great gifts of mind and will.

Man has received from God many talents, and you show that you are aware of these talents and that you can use them with distinction and determination. The practice of sport in your own particular situation shows not just a natural need for physical activity, nor is it merely linked with the spontaneous instinct for friendly competition. It also shows your human abilities and the wealth of capacities at your command. In this way you say to the world that there are many goals that you can reach also in your social activities.

4. In the writings of the New Testament the Christian vocation is often likened to a road or journey.

You know from experience what a problem exists for those who cannot actually see which way to take. But everyone knows that the road to be taken does not consist of steps but of a choice which will give meaning to the whole of life, it is a very different outlook that is needed. The power of reasoning and reflection, the proper use of judgment, the wisdom of the heart: these are the gifts which guide us along the paths of life's commitment.

With silent dignity you can offer a great lesson, a healthy sign to the people among whom you live, to the men and women of our age who are often discontent and deeply disturbed within. To them you can point out the right direction on the road of life. You can show in a convincing way that a person is not impoverished when, guided by the voice of God, he or she knows how to reach decisive goals and achievements. This calls for an attitude of faith, founded on the word of the Lord, a faith which truly knows how to listen. You are magnificent listeners, and you know that it is precisely through the word that God comes to meet us. You give to the world the precious and meaningful example of people who know how to pay attention to the suggestions of the inner voice of God.

Thus, drawing upon the great wealth of your humanity, you will be able to show to all who meet you that a greatness of spirit and an attentive capacity for listening are the correct way to discover in the depths of the soul the light which illumines every one who comes into the world (Cf. Io. 1, 9).

5. Finally, a word to you who accompany and assist these young people. You help your visually handicapped friends to discover and to achieve their potential, you encourage them to have the fortitude and confidence to apply themselves responsibly to all the activities of which they are capable. You are the ones who lead them to the full realisation of their human capacities. Your work begets a deep friendship between you, and it is accompanied by generous diligence and strong concern for one another. I thank you and I congratulate you for the successes which you obtain; I thank you especially for that great joy, comfort and security which you succeed in instilling in your blind friends.

And now as a pledge of my deep affection, I invoke upon you, my brothers and sisters, and upon your loved ones and all those who give you their loving care, the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

I would like to add a further word for the athletes taking part in the third European Marathon Cup. I thank you for your visit, and I would remind you that being young means seeking the right path for one's life, a path that makes it possible to carry out personal commitments by following truth, justice and service of the common good. Keep this thought in mind while you are running your long race, and may God bless you.

**SPORTS CAN HELP SPREAD FRATERNITY AND PEACE**  
**ADDRESS TO FICEP ASSEMBLY**

**April 3, 1986**

1. I am delighted to be able to meet you who are participating in the Assembly of the Catholic Federation of Physical and Sports Education, which is celebrating here in Rome the seventy-fifth anniversary of its foundation.

I greet the presidents and members of the various delegations, along with the representatives of the different associations belonging to FICEP. I have noticed that almost all the countries of Europe are listed here, and this shows the vitality of the Association and its meaningful presence in the sporting environment, through the individual national organizations.

I congratulate you on the work of human and spiritual formation that you aim for in the world of sport, faithful to the institutional goals of the federation. Already in 1906 it had established its purpose of bringing together Catholic forces in order to promote healthy physical education, together with religious and moral formation. You have been faithful to this commitment, which constitutes your very reason or existence and the specific object of your apostolate. You have been faithful to your mission in past years, and you wish to continue to be faithful today, in the complex world of contemporary sports which has become a social phenomenon of great importance and interest. I wish to encourage the educational and social work carried out by all of you when you seek to propagate the true meaning of sport, not only in the world of competition and of sporting exhibitions, but likewise in the most common practice of sports: that is, in those activities that each person performs in order to increase his physical abilities and efficiency, for the good of the whole person.

2. As I already said on the occasion of the Jubilee of Athletes, the Church recognizes the fundamental dignity of sport in its intrinsic reality as a factor in human formation and as a component of man's culture and civilization (cf. *Insegnamenti*, VII-1, p. 1006). This appears increasingly true in our day, when athletic activity seems to have become a more common and even necessary reality, in fact, some demands of modern life and work, like the housing complexes of the great urban conglomerates, multiply the situations in which there is a need to find free time in order to exercise strength and dexterity, endurance and harmonious movement, so as to attain or guarantee that physical efficiency necessary to man's overall equilibrium. It is in this context that the human values of sport appear clearest. It is seen as a worthwhile way of using one's time, because in sport man acquires greater self-mastery and manifests a fitting expression of the dominion of his intelligence and will over his body. Whence arises a serene attitude of respect, esteem and redemption for sporting activity, and, as a consequence its consideration as a possible occasion of ennoblement.

May you consider your mission an important effort to bring it about that, with the proliferation of sport activity at the collective level, a "redemption," so to speak, of the sports phenomenon take place, according to the principles always proclaimed by the Church. May every athlete strive to attain, through self-mastery, those basic human virtues that constitute a balanced personality, and that likewise develop a "grateful and humble attitude towards the Giver of every good, and thus of physical health as well, in this way opening up the soul to the horizons of the faith. When practiced with wisdom and balance sport acquires an ethical and formative value, and is a valid school of virtue for life" (John Paul II, *Insegnamenti*, V-3, p. 750).

3. It must be emphasized that an authentic human and Christian formation of athletes indirectly becomes an educational instrument on a more vast social level. Modern interest in competitive sports and sports entertainment is very apparent. They take up a large part of the free time and diversion of the people of today. Obviously, we are not talking about a new phenomenon, but it is clear that today the means of social communication have made the awareness of sporting realities so universal as to make of them a paradigm of mass psychology, by exciting the emotions of the participants, and provoking emulative expressions in the spectators as a result.

Now, if sport is practiced-even in the context of competition-as an occasion for exalting the dignity of the person, it may become a vehicle of fraternity and friendship for all who are following these sporting events. One who attends an exhibition "lives" it in a certain way, participates in its spirit, feels its effects.

In these circumstances, the upper hand should not be given to the glorification of force or, even less, of the use of violence, where the sporting event becomes the occasion for the release of the latent aggressions of some individuals or groups. The spectator, too, must be capable of respecting the fundamental rule of sport as a fair and generous competition, a meeting place, a bond of solidarity.

In this regard, consider the importance of the formation of sports professionals capable in every situation of witnessing to the authentic values of healthy and proper competition. Every "champion" is in some way a model to which young people are very sensitive. Now, if a sense of equality and friendship is spread among the young, if fair relations and serene attitudes prevail in contests; if, in a word, those involved show themselves always capable of respecting the fundamental values of the human person-the end and measure of every sporting activity then sports can help spread a more authentic spirit of brotherhood and peace among the masses of spectators as well.

4. As you see, your efforts towards an ethical formation in the sports environment appear ever more vast, valid and important. I hope that you will be able to continue effectively to carry out, with God's help, the undertaking that you have assumed as a mission.

May the paschal mystery that we are celebrating during these days be for you a motive of inspiration and hope. You, in fact, seek to assist the continual renewal of man in goodness, you seek to help him become able to direct his life towards "a living hope... an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" (1 Pt 1:3-4). With these sentiments, I wish to impart my Apostolic Blessing to all of you and your associations.

## **VIRTUE AND CONTEMPLATION SHOULD BE YOUR DAILY FARE**

### **To the Delegates of the Italian Mountain Climbing Club April 26, 1986**

I now greet the participants in the Assembly of Delegates of the Italian Mountain Climbing Club, who are here with their General President and Central Councilors. You are all welcome to this special audience.

If it is true that sports activity, in developing and perfecting the physical and psychological potential of the person, contributes to a more complete maturity of the character, this is especially true for those who practice mountain-climbing and engage in it in respect for the ideals which this sport sustains and nourishes. I exhort you in the words of my predecessor, Pius XII, to be "docile to the lessons of the mountain:...it is a lesson in spiritual elevation, of an energy which is more moral than physical" (*Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, X pg. 219).

I congratulate you on your programs which aim at educating your members in respect for nature and in a deepened examination of the message which she imparts to the human spirit. Have special concern for the young, to train them to follow the type of life that the mountains demand of their devotees. It requires rigorous virtues in those who practice it: strict discipline and self-control, prudence, a spirit of sacrifice and dedication, care and solidarity for others. Thus we can say that mountain-climbing develops character. In fact, it would not be possible to face disinterestedly the difficulties of life on the mountains if the physical and muscular strength, which is very necessary, were not sustained by a strong will and an intelligent passion for beauty.

Help our members also to be contemplatives, to enjoy ever more deeply in their mind the message of creation. In contact with the beauties of the mountains, in the face of the spectacular grandeur of the peaks, the fields of snow and the immense landscapes, man enters into himself and discovers that the beauty of the universe shines not only in the framework of the exterior heavens, but also that of the soul that allows itself to be enlightened, and seeks to give meaning to life. From the things that it contemplates, in fact, the spirit is lifting up to God on the breath of prayer and gratitude toward the Creator.

To all of you, to the members of the your club, and to all who practice the sport of mountain-climbing, I gladly impart my Blessing.

## **THE IDEALS OF SPORT PROMOTE PEACE**

**To the Participants of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Italian International Tennis Championship May 15, 1986**

Dear Friends,

1. I am pleased to meet you, the directors of the Italian Tennis Federation and the participants in the 43rd Italian International Tennis Championship. I gladly welcome you to the Vatican and I hope that your visit will serve as a moment of spiritual refreshment in the midst of the intense physical demands of the present Championship. I congratulate you on the excellence of your achievements in your sport, and I express the hope that you will always consider your ability as a gift to you from God Himself. It is always a pleasure for me to meet groups of athletes from different countries and continents. Taking part in sport and the healthy competitiveness which accompanies it embody precious values which can do much to uplift the individual, and indeed can contribute much to building a society based on mutual respect and trust, and authentic peace.

2. On various occasions, I have spoken publicly about sport as a real instrument of reconciliation in the world. Your presence here, from many countries, is an eloquent symbol of the power of sport to unite. It brings people together. Competition between athletes is a universal language which immediately goes beyond the frontiers of nation, race or political persuasion. All of this on condition that the men and women who engage in sport, especially on the international level, foster its inherent positive values, without allowing it to degenerate through excessive concern for merely material advantages or through undue subordination to partisan ideologies.

Yours is a very competitive sport, and the high degree of physical fitness, self-control, discipline and sacrifice which it requires can make it a truly effective school of human and social maturity. As a group, you are very frequently in the public eye. You therefore have a responsibility, especially to young people and children who look to you for example, to set high standards of sportsmanship and personal excellence. The ideals of fair play, honesty, friendship, collaboration and mutual respect which are so much a part of sport are very important building blocks of the new civilization of peace to which the youth of the world ardently aspire. I would very much like to encourage you along that path.

3. I expect you are aware that the New Testament uses the example of the athlete to illustrate a very profound aspect of human existence. Saint Paul writes: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may attain it" (1 Cor 9:24). In a sense that is your everyday experience in tennis!

But Saint Paul is referring to the challenge of giving ultimate meaning to life itself. This is the challenge which stands before each individual and before humanity as a whole. Today, when there is so much loss of hope and so much confusion as to the purpose and meaning of life, cannot the values enshrined in sport open new horizons of humanism and solidarity to vast sectors of the world's young people? Is it not possible to think that leaders in various fields of sport will endeavor to give a living and convincing testimony of the beauty and worthiness of those values? Will you not put your talents and your leadership in the service of peace, of human dignity, of genuine freedom? And in this way-to borrow another image from Saint Paul-you will give glory to God the Creator through your accomplishments, including your accomplishments on the sports field (cf. 1 Cor 6:20).

Dear friends, be assured of my prayers for your personal and spiritual well-being. I would ask you to take my greetings to your families and friends. And may Almighty God bless you and protect you always.

## **"BE EXAMPLES OF HUMAN VIRTUES"**

**To the Athletes of the Athletics World Championships In Rome September 2, 1987**

Dear young Athletes,

1. I thank you for this visit on the occasion of the Athletics World Championships being held in Rome. I am happy to meet you and welcome you in friendship, and I wish you every success in your demanding competitions.

I am happy to greet and also thank in a particular way, the Council members of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, all the members of the International Sports Organizations, the leaders, the coaches, and all the athletes from the 167 countries who are taking part in these Championships. A special word of welcome, prompted by happy memories of meetings similar to this one, goes to the sports veterans, all the participants in past competitions, who have come to the present meeting in order to honor sport and admire the achievements of the new champions.

I also wish to greet the journalists and the representatives of the press and television, promoters of information and interest in the world of sport among people of all ages and especially among youth. A particular word of thanks goes to Doctor Primo Nebiolo for his kind address and the gift of the gold medal of the Championships.

2. This year's meeting coincides with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the foundation of the International Amateur Athletic Federation. I would, therefore, like to express my cordial best wishes to the Federation and to commend you for your work. You aim not only to coordinate and develop athletic disciplines within the member countries, but you also strive to create, through international sports meetings, *opportunities for the fostering of friendship, brotherhood and understanding between peoples.*

The Church gives willing support to such initiatives. The Second Vatican Council observes in this regard that people are enriched with mutual understanding also "by means of physical exercise and sport, which can help... to foster friendly relations between peoples of all classes, countries, and races" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 61).

3. We all know that sport is a highly disciplined exercise of the human body. It seeks to develop a person's physical faculties, such as strength, stamina, skill-~~alt~~ working together towards a harmony of movement and action. Through sport we try to attain physical excellence, by means of necessary training and practice. Its aim is perfection in a given event, as well as the breaking of significant records, as has already happened during these competitions.

However, there is another dimension to sports activity. Sport is also an important moment for guaranteeing the balance and total well-being of the person. In an age that has witnessed the ever-increasing development of various forms of automation, especially in the workplace, reducing the use of physical activity, many people feel the need to find appropriate forms of physical exercise that will help to restore a healthy balance of mind and body. And from here arises that special interest and attention to sporting events, which today attract great masses to athletic competitions of every kind.

This phenomenon exposes you athletes to considerable psychological pressures because people tend to extol you as heroes, as human models who inspire ideals of life and action, especially among

youth. And this fact places you at the center of a particular social and ethical problem. You are observed by many people and expected to be outstanding figures not only during athletic competitions but also when you are off the sport field. You are asked to be examples of human virtue, apart from your accomplishments of physical strength and endurance.

4. For this reason there are certain values in your life which cannot be forgotten. These values will set you on that clear track which has to be followed in order for you to reach life's ultimate goal. Primary among them is the *religious meaning of human existence*. Sport, as you well know, is an activity that involves more than the movement of the body; it demands the use of intelligence and the disciplining of the will. It reveals, in other words, the wonderful structure of the human person created by God as *spiritual being*, a unity of body and spirit. Athletic activity can help every man and woman to recall that moment when God the Creator gave origin to the human person, the masterpiece of his creative work. As the Scriptures tell us: "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen 2:7). We are reminded then that even the laws of sport belong to a certain order, which is basically that of all creation. The observance of this order is the condition for success.

May this truth never be overlooked or set aside in the world of sport, but may it always shine forth clearly. For athletic activity is never separated from the activities of the spirit. If sport is reduced to the cult of the human body, forgetting the primacy of the spirit or if it were to hinder your moral and intellectual development, or result in your serving less than noble aims, then it would lose its true significance and, in the long run, it would become even harmful to your healthy and full growth as human persons. You are true athletes when you prepare yourselves not only by training your bodies but also by constantly engaging the spiritual dimensions of your person for a harmonious development of all your human talents.

5. My prayer for you, young athletes, is that you will always grow in respect for the authentically human values of sport, thanking God the Creator who has endowed you with extraordinary talents-talents that can be used to work for true peace and fraternal understanding among all peoples of the world.

May your meeting in these days serve this worthy aim. I entrust to the Lord all your noblest hopes and aspirations and I invoke divine blessings upon you, your families and all the persons who are dear to you.

**SPORTS CAN BE VIEWED AS A SERVICE TO MANKIND**  
**The Pope's Address To Conference on "Sports, ethics and faith"**

**November 25, 1989**

("L'Osservatore Romano" Weekly English Edition, N. 2, January 8, 1990, 5.)

*In preparation for the World Cup Soccer finals to be held in Italy in June 1990 the Italian Episcopal Conference sponsored a seminar on the topic of 'Sports, ethics and faith for the development of Italian society'. On Saturday, 25 November, the Holy Father received the congress participants and gave the following address.*

1. In expressing my cordial welcome to all of you, Diocesan Directors of the sports apostolate, directors of athletic associations of Christian inspiration, and to authorities of the Italian world of sports, I want to express my deep satisfaction to the Italian Episcopal Conference which, through the work of the department responsible for this area, has sponsored the national congress on "Sports, ethics and faith for the development of Italian society". Your presence reminds me of my memorable meeting with the athletes in Rome's Olympic Stadium during the Jubilee Year of the Redemption on 12 April 1984.

On that occasion I recalled "the fundamental validity of sports not only for providing terms for illustrating a superior ethical and ascetical ideal, but also in its intrinsic value as a factor in the formation of the person and a component of culture and civilization" (Insegnamenti, VII, 1, 1984, p. 1006.) Indeed, we know that St. Paul refers to sports activity to point out the spirit of courage demanded by the Christian life if one truly wants to be in conformity to Christ. Life according to the Gospel requires a rigorous and constant discipline, and is manifested as a continuous challenge against the forces of the powers of evil present and at work in us and the world. Therefore St. Paul, quite aware of the difficulties, invites us to "fight the good fight of faith" 1 Tim 6:12), not becoming discouraged by obstacles, and suggests that we not forget the certain reality of the prize, saying "run towards the finish line to receive the prize to which God calls (you) on high" (Phil 3:14).

Christian life, therefore, is like a rather demanding sport, combining all a person's energies to direct them towards the perfection of character, towards the goal which realizes in our humanity "the measure of Christ's gift" (Eph 4:7).

2. Your congress is fittingly set within the context of the preparations for the coming World Cup competitions, in order to prepare a serene reflection on an event that will certainly attract the attention of billions of people, at the same time offering the possibility to examine the contribution which sport makes to the development of the person and the improvement of the quality of life. May this time of the Church's reflection cause a growth in the value and authoritativeness of a farsighted teaching to protect man in his physical and moral integrity.

In repeating once again that the Church "cannot abandon man" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 14), but also that the human person is the object of her care, it is legitimate to ask ourselves how sports can truly contribute to the improvement of modern society. We are all concerned on this account because sports can degenerate into manifestations which dishonour the noble ideals which they can promote, and for which millions of people are interested in them.

An indisputably positive factor that today sports are characterized by a demand for quality and meaning. It is necessary to restore to them not only a renewed and continuing dignity, but most of all

the capacity to evoke and sustain some of the deepest human needs, such as mutual respect, a freedom that is not empty but directed to an end, renunciation for a purpose.

3. Your congress is devoted to showing the relationship between sports, ethics and the faith in the complexity and vastness of the various fields, in order to deepen reflection on the reality of sports and to foster a renewed involvement in it corresponding to the objectives of formation, particularly of young people. The Church must be in the front ranks in this area, in order to plan a special apostolate adapted to the needs of athletes and especially to promote sports which can create the condition of a life rich in hope. I am referring to the various activities which the Catholic athletic associations, both in the parishes and the youth centres which are helped by organizations animated by Christian principles, organize for children and young people. I express to them my affection and appreciation for their valuable educative work.

Your congress has also sought to study the relationship between sports and society, in the conviction that sports is a valid factor of socialization and growth in relations of friendship in an atmosphere of solidarity. In such a way you have also sought to view the basic connections between athletic aspects and moral ones.

The ethical conditions of the person in sports and the various situations of athletic organization also need a reference to the relativity of sport in regard to the primacy of the person, thus emphasizing the subsidiary role of sports in God's creative plan. Therefore, sports must also be viewed within the dynamics of service, and not in that of profit. Keeping in mind the objectives of humanization, one cannot fail to notice the unavoidable task of transforming sports ever more into an instrument of the elevation of man towards the supernatural goal to which is called.

Since sport does not exist for its own sake it runs the risk of being raised to the status of a vain and dangerous idol; these deceptive and misleading expressions, which unfortunately are sometimes observed, must be avoided. A healthy use of sports must be attentive to these deviations in order to prevent that well-known occasional recourse which aims merely at obtaining results, but is not concerned with the true advancement of the person or ultimately that of sport itself.

4. Your presence offers me the occasion to express my good wishes for the success of the coming world soccer championships. I know that you have focused your attention on this event also, which will involve not only the cities chosen for the qualifying matches, but millions of people throughout Italy, also because of the presence of so many players and fans from all parts of the world, and the problems which will involve many institutions, organizations, and reception groups.

My wish is that, on the occasion of such an event, the competition may be a wonderful occasion for the exchange of friendship and fraternity. The meeting of persons of various nationalities for a loyal and serene confrontation on the playing fields in some way represents a type of universal gathering where the values of unity and peace emerge. In such a way sports will make its contribution to the building up of the world we wish for, in which every individual truly feels that he is the other's brother and sister.

To you and the whole athletic world I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing, as a pledge of the light and inner strength which only the Lord can give.

**THE WORLD CUP SOCCER FINALS**  
**Address To A Delegation Representing 'Italia 90'**

**December 9, 1989**

(L'Osservatore Romano Weekly English Edition No.2, January 8, 1990, p.5)

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to welcome you and speak to you, although only briefly. I appreciate the words which the President, Mr. Joao Havelange addressed to me, emphasizing that the spirit of universal brotherhood, the fundamental aspiration of all the peoples of the earth, will imbue the coming competition. In greeting cordially all the personages present, I want very much to say that I appreciate the sentiments which have been expressed.

In fact, I am of the opinion that the human person can attain his full dignity only in an atmosphere of authentic brotherhood or, to quote Paul VI's familiar phrase, in a "civilization of love".

2. The Church is aware that she must work for the progress of such a civilization. She carries on "the work of Christ... for he came into the world to bear witness to the truth, to save and not to judge, to serve and not to be served" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 3).

Without seeking earthly ambition, the Church proclaims the greatness of the call of the human being who bears within himself God's image. By virtue of faith, she wants to contribute in a selfless manner to the strengthening of the universal brotherhood of peoples who are all called to lead a free life in justice.

3. Sports, a specifically human activity, must be integrated into this perspective. All competition is based on the mastery of oneself physically and psychologically, for the purpose of constantly improving the performance of each member of the team. Thus it allows the person to mature in faith by individual effort and team spirit.

The practice of sports gives athletes a sense of community which makes the work they do with others more harmonious and fruitful. Its influence extends to many other fields. Each must share his activity, victories and experiences so that he or she may make progress in becoming totally realized in co-operation with others.

4. In this spirit, I encourage you in the accomplishment of this considerable task which has been entrusted to you. At this time, I am happy to express my wish that the World Cup Soccer finals, "Italia 90", will contribute to the growth of knowledge and mutual respect among peoples, in the joy and serenity of true solidarity.

Such an important gathering of players and public will reflect, we hope, the basic unity of the human family. This could be the occasion, for many participants and spectators to rediscover that the "other" - person, people, or nation - is his "equal", his counterpart in joy and in life (cf. Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n.39).

May the Lord assist you! I pray that God's gifts and blessing be given to you, to all your co-workers, to those who are dear to you, and to all who benefit from your organizational work.

**STADIUM BLESSING MARKS START OF INTERNATIONAL PLAYOFFS: POPE JOHN  
PAUL II INAUGURATES 'ITALIA 90' CUP**

**May 31, 1990**

Dear Sports Enthusiasts,

1. In a few days, this sports arena, like so many others in different Italian cities, will become the centre of interest of the football fans of the whole world: it will be the setting of the festival of youth, the festival of football.

I extend warm thanks to Mr. Joao Havelange, President of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), Mr. Arrigo Gattai, President of the Italian Olympic Committee, and the Hon. Franco Carraro, Mayor of Rome, for the kind words which they have addressed to me. I offer respectful greetings to the President of the Council of Ministers and all the authorities present. A special greeting to all of you, the friends of sport, representing the nations that will be taking part in the World Cup, to the directors and craftsmen who have contributed to the refurbishing of the Stadium. Together with the Cardinal Vicar, I greet the young people of the city of Rome who have been determined not to miss such an important event. My thoughts go also to all those following this ceremony on radio and television in many countries of the world. I greet you all with affection.

2. I willingly accepted the invitation addressed to me, at the opening of the World Football Championships, to bless this refurbished and enlarged Olympic Stadium. My presence here is meant to express once more *the Church's pastoral concern for the world of sport*. In the coming days many people from every continent will be converging on this and other stadiums. Their enthusiasm for sport gives them a common interest which brings them together in honest rivalry and sincere friendship. These are values to which the Church cannot remain indifferent, for they are closely connected with the message of universal brotherhood which she proclaims.

In the coming days the various teams will be called upon to face an extremely exacting challenge: to ensure that every game is an occasion of honest play, recreation and friendship. This is a challenge that involves not just the players but all sports enthusiasts. In fact, the value of a football competition like this consists basically in the fact that it enables so many people, differing in background and nationality, to come together, get to know one another, learn to respect one another, and to enjoy competing with one another honestly and in a spirit of healthy rivalry, without giving in to the temptation to selfishness and violence.

Sport is certainly one of the most popular human activities and can greatly influence people's behavior, especially that of the young. But it too is subject to risks and misunderstandings, and must therefore be directed, developed and guided so as to express its potential in a positive way.

"Sport is at the service of man and not man at the service of sport" -this is what we read in the "Manifesto" signed by numerous athletes in this very Stadium on 12 April 1984 on the occasion of their International Jubilee. "Sport", the document continues, "is the joy of living, the desire for self-expression in freedom, the striving for complete self-development; it is a test of loyalty and generosity, a meeting place, a bond of solidarity and friendship".

3. Yes, apart from being a festival of sport, the World Football Championships can become *a festival of solidarity between the peoples*. But this presupposes that the competitions are considered for what they really are: a game in which the better side wins, and at the same time an occasion for

dialogue, growth, understanding and mutual human enrichment.

It is therefore necessary to specify and overcome *the dangers which threaten modern sport*: from the obsessive preoccupation with gain to the commercialization of almost every aspect of sport, from the excessive emphasis on the spectacular to athletic and technical exhaustion, from the use of doping and other forms of fraud to violence.

It is only by effectively recovering its purpose and its educational and social potential that sport can play a significant role and make its own contribution to fostering the hopes which move people's hearts, especially the young, in this last part of the century which is leading us into the Third Christian Millennium.

4. On the work sites, both those opened in the various cities for the restructuring of stadia and those set up to provide new services, thousands of craftsmen and workers have been employed and have been working extremely hard. Tragically, some have been killed in the course of the work: as I pray to the Lord for the deceased, I also express my sincere sympathy to the families who have been so severely struck.

The consideration of this "human cost", dear sports enthusiasts, also confirms my hope that the efforts and sacrifices made will make "Italia '90" a moment of growth in brotherhood for your fellow citizens and for all people. Concern with the sporting spectacle which in these coming days will occupy world public opinion must not cause us to forget the urgency of the problems and of the great expectations of humanity. Indeed, it should convince us all even more that by concentrating our living energies and coordinating our wills in a general mobilization, as has been done here, we can face and conquer the great challenges of our time: the struggle against hunger, the attainment of peace, the building of a world in which every human being is accepted, loved and valued.

I entrust to all of you this wish of mine, which becomes an urgent encouragement and trustful prayer.

5. At this point I cannot fail to offer a special greeting to you, the players from so many countries, who are the real protagonists of the coming world matches. The eyes of sports fans throughout the world are fixed on you. Be conscious of your responsibility! It is not only the champion in the stadium but also the whole person who should become *a model for millions of young people, who need "leaders", not "idols"*. They need men who can convey to them the zest for challenge, a sense of discipline, the courage to be honest and the joy or unselfishness. Your steady and generous example can inspire them to face life's problems with equal commitment and enthusiasm.

It is significant that some of the expressions of the language of sport are not unfamiliar to Christ's disciples: terms like selection, training, self-discipline, persistence in resisting exhaustion, reliance on a demanding guide, honest acceptance of the rules or the game. For the Christian life too demands systematic spiritual training, since the Christian like "every athlete exercises self-control in all things" (1 Cor 9:25).

6. Dear players, you have come from every part of the world to Rome, the ancient home of the Caesars and the ever living centre of Christianity. The Eternal City offers you its heritage of classical monuments and Christian values. Try to listen to the noble human and religious message addressed to you by the many memorials and ruins that are so filled with history. Do not be distracted guests, unable to hear the thousand voices speaking of moral greatness and above all Christian heroism, often expressed by the supreme witness of martyrdom!

The Pope is here among you to bless this refurbished Stadium, but he is here above all to call your attention to *the treasures that twenty centuries of Christian history have accumulated in this City* through the contribution of whole generations of believers. You will be able to recognize its traces in the religious and civil buildings, in the names of streets and squares, in the words inscribed on stone or spoken from the lips of the faithful, who still today throng its churches.

Dear young people, you are the very best that your respective nations have to offer for this sporting competition. Be proud of this honor, but also take to heart the responsibility you have to represent your country with dignity, offering in fair exchange the gift of your zest for life and for everything that makes life noble and great. Do not forget that nothing in the world is greater or more noble than what was brought to us by Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh for our eternal salvation.

In his name I express the hope that your stay in Rome, which is the See of Peter and the centre of the Church, will bring each one of you closer to the treasures of truth and life that the Gospel upholds for all people of today and tomorrow. May the sporting effort which you are preparing for help you to strive for the highest goals to which life's struggle calls you. With these sentiments I ask God to look kindly upon all who will take part in this generous and honest competition so that it will be a source of harmony and friendship.

May the blessing of Almighty God be in your hearts and fill them with peace and joy.

**THE CHURCH RESPECTS SPORTS WORTHY OF THE HUMAN PERSON**  
**To the Participants of the Italian Masters Water-Skiing**

**September 14, 1991**

("L'Ossevatore Romano" Weekly English Edition n.39 September 30, 1991, p.9)

*On 14 September the Holy Father received the participants in the "Italian Masters - Memorial Marco Merlo" water-skiing show which was taking place on nearby Lake Albano. The Pope greeted them in the following words.*

Dear Friends,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome members of the Italian National Olympic Committee and the participants in the 'Italian Masters - Memorial Marco Merlo' water-skiing event. I thank Mr. Aldo Franchi, President of the Italian Water-skiing Federation, for his kind words of introduction. I greet you all and wish you well in your championship.

The fact that you come from so many countries makes your gathering a magnificent occasion for meeting people of different backgrounds and for building friendships beyond all barriers of race, culture or political experience. You are united, first of all, in your sporting interest. You share a passion for the sport of water-skiing. It has become a dynamic source of communication and contact between you. Your sporting activities not only bring out certain qualities in each one of you individually. They not only impel you to give the best of yourselves physically and competitively; they also invite you constantly to reach out to discover the bonds that unite you with others. Indeed, sports are a uniquely effective means of building mutual esteem and respect, human solidarity, friendship and goodwill among peoples.

The Church values and respects sports which are truly worthy of the human person. They are such when they foster the orderly and harmonious development of the body at the service of the spirit, and when they constitute an intelligent and formative competition which stirs up interest and enthusiasm, and are a source of enjoyable relaxation. I encourage you to have this ideal always before you, so that your dedication to sport will be matched by a striving for the higher values which will give you dignity and moral stature in your own eyes and in the eyes of those who follow your achievements.

The ancient Romans set great store by the educational value of sports and competitions. In the Christian tradition, the struggle for virtue and fidelity to Christ have often been presented under the metaphor of athletic competition. Saint Paul speaks of his life as a race in which it is vital to reach the final goal (cf. 1 Cor 9:24-27). It is my hope that your visit on this occasion will be an opportunity for you to commit yourselves once more to the highest ideals of human solidarity and to faithfulness in your relations with God, our Creator and Redeemer.

May his abundant blessings be with you and your families.

**“THE JUST WAR IS TO MAKE WAR ON WAR”**  
**Address to Military Athletes participating in the First World Military Games**

**7 September 1995**

(“L’Osservatore Romano Eng Ed. n. 40, October 4, 1995, p. 4)

*"Enough war! The just and rightful war is to make war on war", the Holy Father said on Thursday, 7 September, to over 4,000 athletes taking part in the First World Military Games, which were held in Rome. Here is a translation of the Pope's address, which was given in Italian.*

1. I am very glad to meet you, dear young military personnel, who have gathered in Rome from all over the world for the First World Military Games. I address a special greeting to Archbishop Giovanni Marra, Military Ordinary for Italy, and to Mr Domenico Coricane, Minister of Defence of the Italian Government, whom I sincerely thank for their courteous words and for his reflections of high moral value. With him, I greet the Ministers of Defence of other nations who are present at this meeting.

I would also like to express my sincere pleasure to Mr Samaranch, President of the International Olympic Committee, as well as to the President and members of the International Council for Military Sport, which sponsored this important sporting event that is taking place with "friendship through sport" as its motto. Lastly, I offer my cordial greetings to General Casale, President of the Organizational Committee, the distinguished members of the committee itself and Mr. Rutelli, Mayor of Rome.

The participation of over 4,000 young military athletes from more than 100 countries on every continent gives this event a meaning which exceeds by far sporting competition itself and becomes an encounter of peoples who, through sport, desire to send a powerful message of peace to the world.

2. This year we commemorated the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War with a series of events, and we are preparing to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Organization. These First World Military Games are rightly one of the activities commemorating those events, which have been proposed with a view to humanity's future and with the commitment to advance mutual knowledge, brotherhood, friendship and peace between peoples. The aim of sports has always been to unite men over and above racial, religious and political differences. This role, so apparent in traditional sporting contests, becomes far more explicit on the occasion of this great sporting event, which involves military personnel at a world level.

Indeed, in the competitions planned for these games, sportsmen from all over the world will compete against one another, even athletes and teams from countries divided by recent or long-standing disagreements, if not actually by the bloody wars that are still sowing death and destruction.

As the venue for these First World Military Games, you have appropriately chosen Rome. The universal vocation which in many ways distinguishes this city, certainly underscores the message of friendship and brotherhood that your sporting event transmits and spreads not only among the participants, but also among the peoples whom you worthily represent and who, with you, are looking to the future of the world with thoughts of peace and universal fellowship.

3. Dear friends, you are at the same time military personnel and athletes. Both these states of life require physical qualities and moral virtues. They imply physical training, but also a rule of life,

discipline, a strong will, fidelity to one's duties, a spirit of sacrifice and the ability to suffer, in order to be able to reach the constantly higher goals that athletics require.

Sport is a school of life but military service also tempers and fortifies personal character, preparing individuals to face the difficulties and trials of life with greater confidence and courage.

At this pleasant meeting; I would like to stress that the Church admires you for being military personnel and athletes at the same time. By competing in athletic competitions, in the world's eyes you highlight the fact that the soldier is not and must not be a man of war, but one who, though committed to defending his country, can be a man who first of all seeks cooperation between peoples and who works so that nations may grow in friendly and peaceful relations.

Your sporting event, bringing together representatives of a large number of countries, can make a strong contribution to reinforcing and spreading this identity of the soldier as the servant of the security and freedom of peoples, one who is constantly motivated by the spirit of peace. All military personnel in doing their duty, must feel in their heart that they are soldiers of peace.

4. This last part of the century, on the eve of the third millennium, did well to hope for a future in which humanity is reconciled at last. Unfortunately grievous situations of war have recurred both in the heart of Europe and in Africa. May this outstanding sporting event of yours, which fits in well with the many other events commemorating the end of the Second World War, become the opportunity for renewing the common appeal for peace with a stronger and more determined voice.

In my Message to the world on the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War I had special words for you too. "Dear Young People", I wrote, "I have great confidence in your ability to be authentic witnesses to the Gospel. Make a personal commitment to serve life and peace.... Reject sterile and violent ideologies. Renounce every form of extreme nationalism and intolerance. It is along these paths that the temptation to violence and war slowly but surely appears. You have been given the mission of opening new paths to fraternity among peoples, building a single human family" (n. 15). And, as if accepting this invitation, you have come here to testify to your will solemnly to assume this commitment.

5. You have come here with joy in your hearts at the opportunity to take part in an athletic event of great importance, living "friendship through sport". You have turned your back on political barriers and ideologies, which for decades have divided the world into opposing blocs, and you are preparing for a serene, lively and promising athletic competition.

Elsewhere instead, even not far away, others, spurred only by hatred and revenge, are confronting each other not on a sports field but among the ruins of their own destroyed cities. Their hands do not grip well-won athletic trophies, but still brandish weapons dripping with blood.

What a contrast between the painful spectacle of violence and death which is offered to us daily by the mass media - scenes to which our appalled eyes can never become accustomed - and the comforting spectacle full of promise that you offered yesterday at the opening ceremony of the Games!

Side by side, advancing in orderly files proudly behind your own national flag, once again you have expressed the conscious certitude of being able to become the artisans of a renewed society, in an intense dialogue between military personnel of various nations, among which weapons are silent and consciences, minds and hearts resound with the noble art of sport. Dear young military personnel, all this gives me great comfort and hope.

6. I am pleased to note that your sporting events are a new form of dialogue between the world's servicemen, a pedagogy as it were that creates a culture of peace. A whole generation of young people in uniform, from the armed forces, the police forces and the special armed detachments in the service of the State, thus admirably become a bold challenge that seeks to build a world of peace and to overcome the barbarian, inhuman criterion of resorting to war as a means of settling controversies. It is now time to declare forcefully: "Enough war! The just and rightful war is to make war on war".

I commend this message of peace to your fine event and to each one of you, so that it may reach every corner of the world and make brothers of all peoples, in the one family of God, of which you who are united here as military personnel to create friendship through sport, are a promising sign.

I extend my cordial greeting to you who are present here, and to all your friends in the Forces, I extend my cordial greeting and blessing.

**ADDRESS TO A DELEGATION OF THE  
BARCELONA FOOTBALL CLUB  
May 14, 1999**

Dear President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am happy to receive the directive council and the athletes of the different sectors of the “Fútbol Club Barcelona”, which celebrates this year its hundredth anniversary. I wish to thank Mr José-Luis Nuñez, President of the Association, for his kind words and at the same time, I cordially greet all of you here present. I am pleased that you have wished to include this encounter with the Holy Father among the commemorative events of this centennial.

Your presence here allows me to recall your beautiful city, laborious and rich in culture, that I had the joy of visiting in 1982. I celebrated Holy Mass precisely in “Nou Camp”, the stadium that bears witness to your sportive competitiveness and it was there I received a membership card of your club.

2. You represent a sporting activity that every weekend that draws crowds of people to the stadiums and to which the means of social communication dedicate ample attention. For this reason you have a special responsibility. With affection, and with the admiration I have for sport, I encourage you to continue to make the world of sport meritorious, not only by bringing the best of your physical strength to the different sports disciplines, but also by promoting attitudes that arise from the most noble of human virtues: solidarity, loyalty, fair play and respect for others, who should be considered as competitors and never as enemies or rivals. Likewise, it is necessary to promote a strong will, patience, endurance, balance, simplicity, a spirit of sacrifice and self-control, basic elements of every sporting effort, that determine the success and class of the athlete. Upon this foundation the Christian virtues are developed when these values are assumed with interior conviction and are encouraged with the love of Christ.

I am convinced that sport, when it is not transformed into a myth, is an important factor of social and moral education, both on the personal and communitarian level. In this regard, the Second Vatican Council teaches that “sports activity help to preserve equilibrium of spirit even in the community, and to establish fraternal relations among men of all conditions, nations and races” (Gaudium et spes, n. 61).

3. Dear representatives of “Barça”: this encounter offers me the opportunity to make some reflections about the world of sport, where your Club has played a prominent role during these last hundred years. In congratulating you on this anniversary, I invite you to exercise a renewed effort, noble and fruitful, along the same lines. All of this must not merely serve to obtain greater competitive success, which will certainly give satisfaction to your supporters, but it must also serve to promote sporting events that increasingly favor interpersonal relationships, establishing genuine bonds of friendship and peaceful coexistence among all peoples.

4. It is my wish that your sport be illuminated by these reflections. My hope in this Centennial year is that your participation in various tournaments may raise your spirits to greater heights. May Our Lady of Mercy, the patroness of Barcelona, who has welcomed you so many times when you offered her your trophies, always accompany you in your efforts for spiritual and moral growth with her maternal protection! While reiterating my gratitude for your visit, I cordially impart on all of you my Apostolic Blessing.

## ANGELUS MESSAGE: WORLD DAY OF PEACE

**January 1, 2000**

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. Let us give thanks to God, who has given us the opportunity to begin another year. As I beseech him to protect and give his grace to everyone, I offer my most cordial wishes to all for a happy New Year 2000!

On Christmas night, we listened once again to the angels' message: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased" (Lk 2: 14). This is the proclamation of hope which I wanted once again to present in my traditional Message for today's World Day of Peace. God loves us and he gives everyone the hope of a new time, a time of salvation and peace.

2. Yes, Christ is our peace. He calls us to love every human being without discrimination, turning our hearts and minds to thoughts of peace and removing the temptation of violence and war. The Jubilee which has just begun is a pressing invitation to love in view of a reconciled humanity.

Let us cross the threshold of a new year with a commitment to make our contribution so that peace can become the daily language of peoples. The Gospel teaches us that dialogue, cooperation, respect for life and solidarity are effective instruments for creating new relationships between peoples and countries, between rich and poor, believers and non-believers.

From every part of the earth rises a heartfelt plea for peace. Let us pray that it does not go unheard. At this moment, my thoughts turn to those who are victims of violence, to those who feel lonely and abandoned.

May Christ, the incarnate Son of God, enlighten human hearts with the gift of peace. You, Son of the Most High, were born for everyone. You are the same yesterday, today and for ever!

3. The first day of the year is placed under the special protection of Mary. Let us begin the Year 2000 under the loving gaze of the Mother of God, who gives Christ, the Prince of Peace, to the world. May she spread the mantle of her motherhood over all of us, protect us from evil and free us from hatred and violence. May she accompany humanity on the ways of peace. May every person discover in others, beyond every border, the face of brothers and sisters, friends, members of the same family.

Mary, Mother of God, make us apostles of peace!

*The Holy Father also addressed participants in the city of Rome's international marathon. The runners had assembled in St Peter's Square, the race's starting-point.*

I extend my most cordial greeting to those taking part in the great "City of Rome Marathon", a special event that opens the Jubilee Year for those involved in sport. I greet in particular the directors of the International Track and Field Federation, the directors of the Italian National Olympic Committee, the Mayor of Rome and the other authorities here.

Dear athletes, fans, organizers and those in charge of this interesting sports adventure, you have chosen the first day of 2000 for your now traditional event.

I willingly bless all of you who are taking part in the competition and you, even more numerous, who are taking part in the so-called "stracittadina". At the dawn of a new year - of an extraordinary year like 2000 - in running through the streets of the city of Rome, you make yourselves messengers of brotherhood and peace.

Yours is a long race that demands commitment and effort and for which you have prepared with the appropriate training. What is important for each runner is to reach the goal.

Life can be compared to a unique marathon which we are all called to run, each in his own way and at his own pace. A common goal awaits us, however, and it is the encounter with Christ. My deep hope is that throughout this Jubilee Year every man and woman will become aware of the meaning and value of life to be spent at the service of their brethren, according to God's providential plan.

Dear brothers and sisters, have a good marathon! May this race be a celebration of sport and brotherhood! Happy New Year 2000! May the New Year and the new millennium be as beautiful as today!

## ADDRESS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION OF FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION May 8, 2000

Ladies and Gentlemen!

1. I cordially welcome each of you who come from the 51 member countries of the Union of European Football Associations and have gathered in Rome for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. Almost all the European nations are represented at today's meeting. In particular, the presence of the Federations from the East, which joined your Union after the fall of the Berlin Wall, shows even more the desire for peace and brotherhood which inspires your federations, as well as the commitment to expand horizons, to overcome every barrier and to create systematic communication among the various peoples, in order to make an effective contribution to the building of European unity.

I am therefore grateful for this visit, which allows me to appreciate the noble goals that inspire your service, which is meant to encourage a sport that can promote all the values of the human person. I greet Mr Luciano Nizzola, President of the Italian Football Federation, and thank him for his cordial words to me on behalf of those present.

2. In contemporary society football is a widespread sporting activity which involves a great number of people, and, in particular, young people. In this sport, apart from the possibility of healthy recreation, they also have an opportunity for physical development and athletic achievement, calling for sacrifice, constant commitment, respect for others, loyalty and solidarity.

Football is also a major mass phenomenon, involving many individuals and families, from stadium and television spectators to all those who work at various levels in the organization of sporting events, the training of sportsmen and the vast sector of the mass media.

This fact emphasizes the responsibility of those who look after the organization and promote the spread of this sporting activity at professional and amateur level. They are called never to lose sight of the significant educational possibilities which football, like other similar sporting disciplines, can develop.

In a special way, sportsmen, especially the more famous, should never forget that they in fact become models for the world of youth. It is therefore important that, apart from typically sporting skills, they also carefully develop human and spiritual qualities which will make them truly positive examples in the public mind. Furthermore, given the spread of this sport, it would be good if promoters, organizers at different levels and communications personnel engaged in concerted efforts to ensure that football never loses its genuine characteristic of being a sporting activity, and that it is not submerged by other concerns, especially economic ones.

3. Dear friends, you have come to Rome to celebrate the Great Jubilee. During the Holy Year the Church invites all believers and people of good will to consider their thoughts and actions, their expectations and hopes in the light of Christ, "the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22).

This implies a journey of genuine conversion, that is, the renouncement of the worldly mentality that wounds and degrades human dignity; it also implies the adherence with total trust and courageous commitment to the liberating way of thinking and acting taught by the Gospel. How can we not see the Jubilee as an invitation to make sports one more opportunity for the authentic promotion of the greatness and dignity of man? In this perspective, football structures are called to be a field of

authentic humanity, where young people are encouraged to learn the great values of life and to spread everywhere the great virtues that are the basis of a worthy human society, such as tolerance, respect for human dignity, peace and brotherhood.

I am certain, dear friends who represent the European Federations, that you share my hopes, so that football will become more and more a place of tranquillity and that every match will achieve what sports must be: an overall development of the body, a sound spirit of competition, an education in the values of life, *joie de vivre*, fun and recreation.

4. May football, like every sport, become more and more the expression of the primacy of being over having, freeing itself - as your representative opportunely remarked just now - from everything that prevents it from being a positive occasion of solidarity and brotherhood, mutual respect and sincere encounter among the men and women of our world.

I also know of the recent efforts of your Federation which, with its own resources, has undertaken a praiseworthy initiative of assistance to poor countries and of special cooperation with Eastern European countries to spread football among young people and to introduce them to a healthy life inspired by sound moral principles. May this be the constant style of all your programmes. Lastly, I ask you to convey my cordial sentiments to the sporting associations you represent, the athletes, all the personnel and their families.

I invoke God's Blessing upon you all.

## **ADDRESS TO THE ORGANIZERS AND PARTICIPANTS IN THE 83<sup>rd</sup> GIRO D'ITALIA CYCLE RACE**

**May 12, 2000**

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear organizers, promoters and participants in the Giro d'Italia!

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the eve of the popular cycle race, which, starting tomorrow, will see many of you as protagonists on the roads of this peninsula. In extending my most cordial welcome to you all, I thank in a special way Dr Cesare Romiti and Dr Candido Cannavo for the kind words that they wished to address to me in the name of those present, words which evoke the ideals and values that inspire this great sporting event.

I extend a particular greeting to the participants in the cycling Relay of Our Lady of Ghisallo, who have come to Rome for the start of the Giro d'Italia, in remembrance of the 50th anniversary of the proclamation, by my Venerable Predecessor Pius XII, of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Ghisallo as the principal patron saint of Italian cyclists.

The esteem, interest and admiration that your historic cycle race has always aroused not only among sports enthusiasts but also among radio and television journalists, as indeed among ordinary people, has made the Giro d'Italia a high-profile sporting event with a great social impact on Italian history and habit.

2. This year's race, coinciding with the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, has special significance. As was fittingly recalled a few moments ago, the Giro d'Italia will start in Rome, ending its first stage in St Peter's Square. We could say then that tomorrow's segment is not just a "prologue" to the Giro d'Italia, but forms a "first stage" in the Jubilee of Athletes, which, please God, we will have the joy of celebrating together on the last Sunday of October at the Olympic Stadium.

This connection between sporting events and Jubilee celebrations highlights the relationship which must always join sports and spiritual values. Indeed it must serve as an important opportunity for reflection and renewal, so that sports may shine with those characteristics of transparency, consistency, honesty and sharing which make it one of the significant vehicles of lofty human values.

In fact every sport, at both the amateur and the competitive level, requires basic human qualities such as rigorous preparation, continual training, awareness of one's personal limits, fair competition, acceptance of precise rules, respect for one's opponent and a sense of solidarity and unselfishness. Without these qualities, sport would be reduced to mere effort and to a questionable, soulless demonstration of physical strength.

3. Even the legitimate search for technical means that are ever more effective and better suited to the race conditions must always be put at the service of the athlete and not vice versa, by avoiding unnecessary risks or those that injure the competitors or the spectators. When sports are played and understood in the right way, they are an extraordinary expression of a person's best inner energies and of his ability to overcome difficulties, to set himself goals to be reached through sacrifice, generosity and determination in facing the difficulties of competition.

Outstanding examples of all this are the noble athletes who have made cycling a great sport in Italy

and in the world. At this time our thoughts naturally turn to Gino Bartali, recently deceased, a great sportsman, an exemplary citizen and a convinced believer. His example continues to be a reference-point for everyone of how sport can be practiced with great human and spiritual energy, making it a shining expression of the highest values of life and of social harmony.

4. Dear friends, I wish all of you, who are about to start the Giro d'Italia, to participate in this important sporting event with a real sense of "sportsmanship", that is, with great competitive passion, but also with a strong spirit of solidarity and sharing.

May you be guided and assisted by the heavenly protection of Mary, to whom the month of May is particularly dedicated, and whom you invoke as your special patron under the beautiful title of Our Lady of Ghisallo. May you also be accompanied by my Blessing, which I affectionately impart to all of you here, to the organizers and to everyone participating in this cycling event, as well as to the entire sporting family of the Giro d'Italia.

## **ADDRESS TO THE ITALIAN SILENT SPORTS FEDERATION May 15, 2000**

1. I gladly extend a cordial welcome to all of you, hearing-impaired athletes, to those who have accompanied you, to the sign-language interpreters and to members of the Organizing Committee for the forthcoming Silent World Games, to be held here in Rome in 2001. Welcome and thank you for your kind visit. I also extend special thanks to your President, Prof. Mario Carulli, for his courteous words to me on your behalf and for describing your federation's plans.

I gladly express my appreciation of your federation's work and of your guiding ideals. They are ideals of solidarity and concern for the individual, which spur you, through sports, to support our many less fortunate brothers and sisters, in order to encourage their full integration into the various areas of social life. This is a highly significant endeavour, which I warmly encourage.

2. You have wished to give next year's important international sporting event the name "silence". Even if it certainly creates difficulties in relation to your surroundings, the "silence" which marks your lives, young hearing-impaired athletes, must not mean that anyone is cut off or isolated. On the contrary, by relying on your inner values and abilities, you put your energies to use and make a valuable contribution, one different, of course, but no less significant, to respect for every individual and to his social integration.

Your association includes hearing-impaired athletes from 80 countries on the five continents. It is undoubtedly a precious opportunity to be together, to know one another better and to give one another support. Together you can offer a witness of hope to those who share your condition. By your courageous human and athletic daring, you show that even apparently insurmountable difficulties can be overcome. How can we fail to recognize that attention given to those in conditions of lesser physical or personal efficiency actually helps society itself to build more respectful relationships among all its members?

May your work achieve the goals it has set for itself, that is, to draw greater attention to the problems of individuals who have difficulty in communication and integration in the broad sense. This attitude leads to a style of human relationships which support mutual cooperation among different individuals and peoples. It also promotes the much desired civilization of acceptance and love, the only one that can remove every humiliating form of exclusion from human society.

3. We are observing the Jubilee Year, in which Christians feel particularly called by their faith to defend and promote respect for every person, whose face reflects the image of Christ. They understand even better that the attention shown to those with physical disabilities is inseparably linked to that witness of human salvation and redemption in which every disciple of Christ must feel involved.

Christ, who gave his life for us out of love, has offered us an example of how we should relate to our brothers and sisters. May he bless your efforts and make them bear good fruit, granting you an abundance of grace, peace and consolation.

With these sentiments, as I offer you my cordial wishes for a successful celebration of the Jubilee Year and a fruitful continuation of your valuable work, especially in view of the forthcoming Silent World Games, I again express to you my esteem and solidarity, and am pleased to impart a special Blessing to you, to your relatives and to all who contribute their skills and dedication to your federation.

## ADDRESS TO THE LAZIO SPORTS CLUB

October 27, 2000

1. Welcome, "bianco-celesti" friends of Lazio, on the 100th anniversary of your club's foundation! This is not the first time that I have had the opportunity to welcome athletes and supporters of various clubs here in the Vatican. However, it does not often happen that I meet such a numerous group of members of a same sports family. Thank you for your kind visit, which enables me to relive the atmosphere and climate of great sporting events, filled with peaceful relaxation and joyful brotherhood.

I cordially greet you all. I greet the representatives of the various disciplines and the spiritual assistants. I especially thank Mr Renzo Nostini, General Manager of the Lazio Sports Club, for the kind words that he addressed to me on behalf of the managers, athletes, sportsmen and sportswomen, supporters and your families. In his words I gathered the meaning of your visit and the enthusiasm of your club, which in these 100 years has written a very interesting page in the book of Italian sport.

2. During the Holy Year of 1900, on 9 January, a promising club with a significant moral and sport tradition was born. This was symbolically expressed in the Latin motto "*concordia parva crescunt* - little things grow with harmony". Events have confirmed the ancient axiom: over the years, Lazio has become a sports club with 28 sections linked by their common Olympic spirit and by a desire for mutual solidarity. I am certain that, by spurring you to rediscover the ideals of the past, this centenary will be a fitting occasion for also emphasizing the ethical-religious dimension, essential for the full maturation of the human person. It is precisely for this reason that you wished to include among your various celebrations a spiritual encounter within the context of the Jubilee. I would like here to quote a well-known expression of the Apostle Paul, which is well suited to your various amateur and competitive activities: "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things" (1 Cor 9: 25). Actually, without balance, self-control, moderation and the ability to interact honestly with others, an athlete is unable to understand the full meaning of physical activity, which is meant to strengthen not only the body but the mind and heart.

3. Sometimes, unfortunately, incidents occur in the sports world that degrade the real meaning of competitiveness and affect not only athletes but the community itself. In particular, the passionate support of one's team must never reach the point of offending persons or damaging the community's property. Every athletic competition must always preserve the character of healthy and relaxing recreation. It is of these values that the Olympic colours - the blue and white - speak. These are the colours that characterize your flag and they must always be kept in view with a sharp and penetrating eye, like that of the eagle emblazoned on your crest.

Dear friends, during its 100 years of life, the Lazio club has offered numerous young people and adults an opportunity to test their strength against the demanding challenges of sport. This is demonstrated by the many Italian and international distinctions received by athletes who were formed within your structures. But it is only right also to remember the practical contribution your association has made to the vast fields of solidarity and volunteer work. In this regard, a special mention must be made of the work offered by your members on the occasion of the recent, unforgettable World Youth Day and the concrete assistance given to the Jubilee of Families.

While I express my appreciation of the good work accomplished, I urge you to continue on this path of service to youth, families and all society. With these wishes, I invoke on you the maternal protection of Mary and bless you all with affection.

**ADDRESS TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE THEME: "DURING THE  
TIME OF THE JUBILEE: THE FACE AND SOUL OF SPORT"**

**October 28, 2000**

1. I am pleased to take part in this international convention on the significant theme: *"During the time of the Jubilee: the face and soul of sport"*. Today I have the welcome opportunity to greet you, who in various capacities are the distinguished representatives of sport, as I wait to meet the entire world of sport, which will celebrate its Jubilee tomorrow at the Olympic Stadium.

I greet the organizers of this meeting, especially the President of the International Olympic Committee, Mr Juan Antonio Samaranch, and the President of the Italian Olympic Committee, Mr Giovanni Petrucci, and I extend my greeting to the various speakers and representatives of the varied dimensions of sport in the world. I thank, in particular, Archbishop Crescenzo Sepe, who expressed your common sentiments, while explaining the meaning of this meeting.

The theme that you chose for your reflection calls attention to the nature and aims of playing sports in our time, which is marked by a great variety of important social changes. Sport is certainly one of the prominent phenomena which, in a language understandable to all, can communicate very profound values. It can be a vehicle of high human and spiritual ideals when it is practised with full respect for its rules; but it can also fail in its true aim when it leaves room for other interests that ignore the centrality of the human person.

2. The theme speaks of the "face" and "soul" of sport. Athletic activity, in fact, highlights not only man's valuable physical abilities, but also his intellectual and spiritual capacities. It is not just physical strength and muscular efficiency, but it also has a soul and must show its complete face. This is why a true athlete must not let himself be carried away by an obsession with physical perfection, or be enslaved by the rigid laws of production and consumption, or by purely utilitarian and hedonistic considerations.

The potential of sports makes it a significant vehicle for the overall development of the person and a very useful element in building a more human society. A sense of brotherhood, generosity, honesty and respect for one's body - virtues that are undoubtedly essential for every good athlete - help to build a civil society where antagonism is replaced by healthy competition, where meeting is preferred to conflict, and honest challenge to spiteful opposition. When understood in this way, sport is not an end, but a means; it can become a vehicle of civility and genuine recreation, encouraging people to put the best of themselves on the field and to avoid what might be dangerous or seriously harmful to themselves or to others.

3. Unfortunately there are many signs, and perhaps they are becoming more evident, of a malaise that sometimes calls into question even the ethical values that are at the basis of athletic activity. In addition to a sport that helps people, there is another that harms them; in addition to a sport that enhances the body, there is another that degrades it and betrays it; in addition to a sport that pursues noble ideals, there is another that looks only for profit; in addition to a sport that unites, there is another that divides.

My hope is that this Jubilee of Sport may be an occasion for everyone, dear leaders, managers, sport enthusiasts and athletes, to find new creative and motivating zeal through sports that know how, in a

constructive spirit, to reconcile the complex demands made by the current cultural and social changes with the unchangeable requirements of the human being.

4. Allow me to make another comment. While it promotes physical fitness and strengthens character, sport must never distract those who practise and appreciate it from their spiritual duties. It would be as though one ran, as St Paul writes, only "for a perishable wreath", forgetting that Christians must never lose sight of "the imperishable one" (cf. 1 *Cor* 9: 25). The spiritual dimension must be cultivated and harmonized with various recreational activities, which include sport. The pace of modern society and of some competitive activities might sometimes cause Christians to forget the need to participate in the liturgical assembly on the Lord's Day. But the need for just and well-deserved recreation must not detract from the duty of the faithful to sanctify holy days. On the contrary, on the Lord's Day athletic activity must be put in a context of peaceful relaxation that encourages togetherness and the growth of communion, especially in the family.

I offer my best wishes for this meeting and, as I invoke the protection of Mary on you, I assure you of a remembrance in my prayer and gladly bless you.

## HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

October 29, 2000

1. *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it!"* (1 Cor 9: 24).

In Corinth, where Paul had brought the message of the Gospel, there was a very important stadium where the "Isthmian Games" were held. It was appropriate, then, for Paul to refer to athletic contests in order to spur the Christians of that city to push themselves to the utmost in the "race" of life. In the stadium races, he says, everyone runs, even if only one is the winner: you too run.... With this metaphor of healthy athletic competition, he highlights the value of life, comparing it to a race not only for an earthly, passing goal, but for an eternal one. A race in which not just one person, but everyone can be a winner.

Today we are listening to these words of the Apostle as we gather in Rome's Olympic Stadium, which once again is transformed into a great open-air church, as it was for the international Jubilee for the world of sport in 1984, the Holy Year of the Redemption. Then, as today, it is Christ, the only Redeemer of man, who welcomes us and illumines our way with his word of salvation.

I offer a warm greeting to all of you, dear athletes and sportsmen and women from every corner of the world, who are celebrating your Jubilee! My heartfelt "thanks" to the international and Italian authorities of sport institutions, and to everyone who helped to organize this extraordinary meeting with the world of sport and its various dimensions.

I thank Mr Juan Antonio Samaranch, President of the International Olympic Committee, Mr Giovanni Petrucci, President of the Italian National Olympic Committee, and Mr Giovanni Rossi, a gold-medal winner at Sydney and Atlanta, for their addresses to me, expressing the sentiments of you all, dear athletes. As I look at all of you gathered in such orderly fashion in this stadium, many memories of sporting experiences in my life come to mind. Dear friends, thank you for your presence and thank you especially for the enthusiastic way you are observing this Jubilee event.

2. With this celebration the world of sport is joining in a great chorus, as it were, to express through prayer, song, play and movement a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. It is a fitting occasion to *give thanks to God for the gift of sport*, in which the human person exercises his body, intellect and will, recognizing these abilities as so many gifts of his Creator.

*Playing sports has become very important today*, since it can encourage young people to develop important values such as loyalty, perseverance, friendship, sharing and solidarity. Precisely for this reason, in recent years it has continued to grow even more as one of the characteristic phenomena of the modern era, almost a "sign of the times" capable of interpreting humanity's new needs and new expectations. Sports have spread to every corner of the world, transcending differences between cultures and nations.

Because of the global dimensions this activity has assumed, *those involved in sports throughout the world have a great responsibility*. They are called to make sports an opportunity for meeting and dialogue, over and above every barrier of language, race or culture. Sports, in fact, can make an effective contribution to peaceful understanding between peoples and to establishing the new civilization of love.

3. The Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 invites each and every person to engage seriously in reflection and conversion. Can the world of sport excuse itself from this providential spiritual dynamism? No! On the contrary, the importance of sports today invites those who participate in them to take this opportunity for an *examination of conscience*. It is important to identify and promote the many positive aspects of sport, but it is only right also to recognize the various transgressions to which it can succumb.

The educational and spiritual potential of sport must make believers and people of good will *united and determined in challenging every distorted aspect* that can intrude, recognizing it as a phenomenon opposed to the full development of the individual and to his enjoyment of life. Every care must be taken to protect the human body from any attack on its integrity, from any exploitation and from any idolatry.

There must be a willingness to ask forgiveness for whatever has been done, or not done, in the world of sport that is in contrast to the commitments made at the last Jubilee. They will be reaffirmed in the "*Sport Manifesto*", which will be presented in a few moments. May this examination offer everyone - managers, technicians and athletes - an opportunity to find new creative and motivating zeal, so that sport, without losing its true nature, can answer the needs of our time: sport that protects the weak and excludes no one, that frees young people from the snares of apathy and indifference, and arouses a healthy sense of competition in them; sport that is a factor of emancipation for poorer countries and helps to eradicate intolerance and build a more fraternal and united world; sport which contributes to the love of life, teaches sacrifice, respect and responsibility, leading to the full development of every human person.

4. "*Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing*" (Ps 125: 5). The responsorial psalm reminded us that *persevering effort is needed to succeed in life*. Anyone who plays sports knows this very well: it is only at the cost of strenuous training that significant results are achieved. The athlete, therefore, agrees with the Psalmist when he says that the effort spent in sowing finds its reward in the joy of the harvest: "Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, they shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves" (Ps 125: 6).

At the recent Olympic Games in Sydney we admired the feats of the great athletes, who sacrificed themselves for years, day after day, to achieve those results. This is *the logic of sport*, especially Olympic sports; it is also *the logic of life*: without sacrifices, important results are not obtained, or even genuine satisfaction.

Once again the Apostle Paul has reminded us of this: "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (1 Cor 9: 25). Every Christian is called to become a strong *athlete of Christ*, that is, a faithful and courageous witness to his Gospel. But to succeed in this, he must persevere in prayer, be trained in virtue and follow the divine Master in everything.

*He, in fact, is God's true athlete*: Christ is the "more powerful" Man (cf. Mk 1: 7), who for our sake confronted and defeated the "opponent", Satan, by the power of the Holy Spirit, thus inaugurating the kingdom of God. He teaches us that, to enter into glory, we must undergo suffering (cf. Lk 24: 26,46); he has gone before us on this path, so that we might follow in his footsteps.

May the Great Jubilee help us to be strengthened and fortified to face the challenges that await us at this dawn of the third millennium.

5. "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*" (Mk 10: 47).

These are the words of the blind man of Jericho in the Gospel episode proclaimed a few moments ago. They can also become our words: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!".

O Christ, we fix our gaze on you, who offer every person the fullness of life. Lord, you heal and strengthen those who, trusting in you, accept your will.

Today, during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, athletes throughout the world are gathered here in spirit, above all to renew their faith in you, man's only Saviour.

And those, like the athlete, who are at the peak of their strength recognize that *without you, O Christ, they are inwardly like the blind man*, incapable, that is, of seeing the full truth, of understanding the deep meaning of life, especially when faced with the darkness of evil and death. Even the greatest champion finds himself defenseless before the fundamental questions of life and needs your light to overcome the demanding challenges that a human being is called to face.

Lord Jesus Christ, help these athletes to be your friends and witnesses to your love. Help them to put the same effort into personal asceticism that they do into sports; help them to achieve a harmonious and cohesive unity of body and soul.

May they be sound models to imitate for all who admire them. Help them always to be athletes of the spirit, to win your inestimable prize: an imperishable crown that lasts forever. Amen!

## JUBILEE OF SPORTS PEOPLE ANGELUS

October 29, 2000

1. At this time of joy we cannot and must not forget that suffering and death continue in certain regions of the world. I am thinking particularly of the Middle East region.

Once again I wish to ask all the parties involved in the peace process to spare no efforts to restore the atmosphere of dialogue that existed until a few weeks ago. Mutual trust, rejection of weapons and respect for international law are the only way to revive the peace process. Let us pray, therefore, for a return to the negotiating table and, through dialogue, for achieving the longed-for goal of a just and lasting peace that will guarantee everyone the inalienable right to freedom and security.

2. We are now ready to conclude the Eucharistic celebration, the heart of this Jubilee event. We have offered sports to God as a human activity aimed at the full development of the human person and at fraternal social relations. This altar, placed in Rome's great Olympic Stadium, has reminded us that sports too are above all God's gift.

This gift now asks to become mission and witness. In the context of the Jubilee Year, the "*Sport Manifesto*" will shortly be read, as if to stress the concrete commitment resulting from this Jubilee.

I extend a cordial greeting to all the French-speaking athletes who are taking part in this Jubilee, and invite them to be, through sport, messengers of peace and brotherhood, as well as examples of upright and harmonious living. With my Apostolic Blessing.

Dear English-speaking participants in this Jubilee celebration, sport has brought you together from different countries in a common interest and shared goals. Your passion for sport is a building block of human solidarity, friendship and goodwill among peoples. May your physical exertions be a part of your quest for the higher values which build character and give you dignity and a sense of achievement, in your own eyes and in the eyes of others. In Christian terms, life itself is a contest and a striving for goodness and holiness. May God bless you in your endeavours, and may he fill you and your families with his love and peace.

I cordially greet the German-speaking athletes, coaches and officials. The "nicest triviality in the world" is often marred by harsh competitive pressure. In all seriousness, may this thought give you serenity: even competition is just a game. Sport should be fun and enjoyable. May God's blessing go with you!

I greet the Spanish-speaking athletes. I invite you to dedicate your efforts to developing the whole person, to fostering peace among peoples and to winning the most valuable prize: receiving God's mercy and being crowned with Christ's glory.

I extend a friendly and encouraging greeting to the professional and amateur athletes from the various Portuguese-speaking countries, reminding everyone that the goal and greatest prize in life is Jesus Christ. May they never be content with less, and they will victoriously mount the podium of eternity.

I cordially greet the athletes from Poland and other countries of the world. On your Jubilee day, I

join you in thanking God for the strength of spirit in which each day you spare no toil and overcome personal weakness in order to achieve your laurels in noble competition in the various disciplines of sport. Your persevering efforts and the joy of victory become a symbol to which anyone who wants to grow spiritually can appeal, particularly the Christian, who, as St Paul says, "fights the good fight", so that once the race of life is over, he may receive from Christ's hands the "crown of righteousness" (cf. *2 Tm* 4: 6-7). God bless you in giving this particular witness.

3. We now turn to Mary Most Holy, invoking her maternal protection on the entire world of sport, so that it may always be inspired by authentic values and contribute to the integral development of the human person and of society.

## ADDRESS TO THE ROMA SPORTS ASSOCIATION

November 30, 2000

1. I am pleased to receive you, dear "Romanisti" friends - managers, athletes and supporters - who form the Roma Sports Association. I greet you with affection and I congratulate you on your decision to celebrate the Jubilee together as one big family.

I extend a special greeting to Dr Francesco Sensi, President of your association, who organized this spiritual initiative, and I thank him for his kind words expressing the sentiments you share.

Your association wanted to take the name "Roma", to be identified in a way with the rich and glorious history of our city. You know that it is a history especially of holiness: the martyrdom of Peter and Paul was followed by that of many other witnesses; down the centuries numerous saints were also born or lived in Rome. Rome, moreover, as the See of Peter's Successor, "presides in charity" (St Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans* 1, 1).

The fact that your association is named Roma means that you, dear "Romanisti", have a special duty to live the Christian faith coherently; it is an invitation to bear daily witness to Gospel love in your surroundings. We could say that the Lord is telling you, as he does every believer living in Rome, what he said to St Paul: "You must bear witness [to me] also at Rome" (*Acts* 23: 11).

2. You are asked to bear this faithful witness especially in sport, which has become one of the characteristic phenomena of our time. Sport concerns and involves vast crowds, especially through the communications media, thus becoming a worldwide event in which different nations and cultures find themselves joined in one festive experience. It is precisely for this reason that sport can promote the building of a more fraternal and united world, thus helping to overcome situations of reciprocal misunderstanding between individuals and peoples.

If played as they should be, sports become a kind of ascesis, an ideal context for practising many virtues. Some of these virtues were clearly stressed by my venerable Predecessor, Pope Pius XII: "*Fair play*, which forbids resorting to subterfuges, *docility* and *obedience* to the wise directions of whoever is guiding the team exercise, a *spirit of self-denial* when it is necessary to stay on the sidelines for the good of one's "colours", *fidelity to one's commitments*, *modesty in triumphs*, *generosity* towards the defeated, *serenity* in misfortune, *patience* with a not always fair audience, *justice*, if competitive sport is linked to freely negotiated financial interests, and, in general, *chastity* and *temperance* already recommended by the ancients themselves" (*Address to the Italian Sports Centre*, 5 October 1955).

Sport, however, becomes an alienating phenomenon when the performance of skill and physical strength results in idolatry of the body; when exaggerated competition leads to regarding one's opponent as an enemy to be humiliated; when the enthusiasm of fans prevents an objective evaluation of the person and events and, above all, when it degenerates into violence. A predominating commercial interest, moreover, can turn sports into a mere search for profit.

Another aspect not to be overlooked is that, due to the way sporting events are currently organized, the proper sanctification of Sunday is sometimes not easy for the faithful, while for families it becomes more difficult to spend moments of beneficial relaxation together.

3. As for football, this is an activity that can be enjoyed by everyone, from children to adults. Because of its ability to bring people together, it offers appreciated entertainment in a general

atmosphere of festivity. Due to its popular nature, football is able to express many expectations and to offer healthy recreation to individual enthusiasts and to entire families.

Sometimes, however, it becomes an occasion for clashes with disturbing episodes of intolerance and aggressiveness, and leads to serious displays of violence. How important it is, then, to remember the proper respect for the ethics of sport! How pressing is the responsibility of managers, athletes, reporters and fans! I am thinking especially of the responsibility that athletes have towards their spectators, especially young people, who look at them as models to imitate. By their example they can communicate a message of high human and spiritual value. Misconduct, on the other hand, causes damaging effects that, unfortunately, are amplified with an unforeseeable negative impact. We must always be aware of this.

4. Friends of the Roma Sports Association! May your Jubilee help you to understand, through the metaphor of sport, the demands of the spiritual life. Life, St Paul reminds us, is like a race in the stadium, where everyone participates. But while in a race there is only one winner, in the race of life all can and must be victorious. And to do so we must be moderate in all things, keep our eyes on the goal, realize the sacrifice and continually train in avoiding evil and doing good. In this way, with the help of God, we will victoriously reach the heavenly goal.

May Mary, whom you invoke in the chapel of your sports centre as *Salus Populi Romani*, assist you in this match that lasts a lifetime; may she protect you, your families and all the "Romanisti".

For my part, I bless each of you and all who have joined you for this Jubilee celebration.

**ADDRESS TO THE "FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION"  
(FIFA)**

**December 11, 2000**

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

With great pleasure I welcome you this morning on the occasion of the Executive Committee Meeting of FIFA. I greet the President Mr Joseph Sepp Blatter and his Vice-Presidents, the Secretary-General Mr Michel Zen-Ruffinen, the Presidents of the International Confederations, and all of you who are responsible for overseeing the world of football, a truly universal task.

Football is indeed a world-wide sport, and this is now more evident than ever, given the massive level of popular interest and media coverage which the sport receives. Yours is a global responsibility, with more than two hundred countries and one hundred and twenty million players involved in your Association. An immense power lies in your hands, and it must be used for the good of the human family.

You are administrators certainly; *but you are educators as well*, since sport can effectively inculcate many higher values, such as loyalty, friendship and team-spirit. It is especially important to keep this in mind at a time when football has also become as it were a global industry. It is true that football's financial success can help to sustain praiseworthy new initiatives, such as FIFA's "Charity Project". But it can also contribute to a culture of selfishness and greed. That is why the finer values of sport must be emphasized and passed on through the bodies represented in your Federation.

As a sport shared by people of different ethnic, racial, economic and social backgrounds, football is an excellent means of promoting the solidarity so greatly needed in a world deeply affected by ethnic and racial tensions. FIFA's "Fair Play Campaign" is a positive sign that you are eager to do your part in using sport to build a climate of respect and understanding between people.

Sport is educational, because it takes human impulses, even potentially negative ones, and turns them to good purpose. The young learn to have healthy competition without conflict. They learn that they can enter an arena in which their opponent is not their enemy. For this reason, I express the earnest hope that FIFA will continue at all levels to tackle the problem of violence, which does so much harm to the game.

In fact, for all its importance as an education for the great challenges of life, football remains a game. It is a form of play, both simple and complex, in which people take joy in the wonderful possibilities of human life - physical, social and spiritual. It would be a sad day if the spirit of play and the sense of joy in fair competition were to be lost. You are the guardians of the true spirit of the game. You have taken as your motto the words "For the Good of the Game". Have no doubt, the good of the game can also be an important part of the good of the world! As a pledge that the Almighty is with you in this task, I invoke upon you and those whom you represent the divine gifts of peace and joy.

God bless you all!

## WELCOME CEREMONY AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE OF ATHENS

### Address of the Holy Father

May 4, 2001

Mr President,

1. I thank you for your kind words of welcome. I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to greet you, and through you to offer a cordial greeting to the members of the Government and of the Diplomatic Missions. I have happy memories, Mr President, of your visit to the Vatican last January, and I thank you for your invitation to come to Greece. Through you I likewise extend heartfelt greetings to all the people of your country. My wish is in some way to recognize the great debt which we all owe to Greece; in fact no one can be unaware of the enduring influence that her unique history and culture have had on European civilization and indeed on that of the entire world.

Last year, Christians everywhere celebrated the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. I had a deep desire to mark that event by becoming a pilgrim to some of the places connected with the history of salvation. This desire became a reality in my pilgrimage to Sinai and to the Holy Land. Now it is to Greece that I come as a pilgrim, in the footsteps of Saint Paul, whose mighty figure towers over the two millennia of Christian history and whose memory is etched for ever in the soil of Greece. It was here in Athens that Paul founded one of the first communities of his voyages in the West and of his mission on the European continent. Here he worked tirelessly to make Christ known; here he suffered for the proclamation of the Gospel. And how could we not recall that it was here in the city of Athens that there began the dialogue between the Christian message and Hellenistic culture, a dialogue which would decisively shape European civilization?

2. Long before the Christian era, the influence of Greece was felt far and wide. In Biblical literature, the later books of the Old Testament, some of which were written in the Greek language, were profoundly marked by Hellenistic culture. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, had a great influence in Antiquity. The world that Jesus himself entered and knew was already deeply imbued with Greek culture. The New Testament was written in Greek, with the result that it spread rapidly. But it was much more than a simple matter of language, for the early Christians also drew upon Greek culture in order to transmit the Gospel message.

Certainly the first encounters of Christianity and high Greek culture were difficult. One indication of this is the reception accorded to Paul when he preached at the Areopagus (cf. *Acts* 17:16-34). While corresponding to the profound expectation of the Athenian people in search of the true God, Paul did not find it easy to preach Christ who had died and was risen, and to show that in Christ is to be found the full meaning of life and the goal of all religious experience. It would fall to the first Apologists, like the martyr Saint Justin, to show that a fruitful encounter between reason and faith was possible.

3. Once the initial distrust was overcome, Christian writers began to see in Greek culture an ally rather than an enemy, and there emerged great centres of Christian Hellenism throughout the Mediterranean world.

Reading the learned writings of Augustine of Hippo and Dionysius the Areopagite, we see that Christian theology and mysticism drew elements from the dialogue with Platonic philosophy. Writers like Gregory of Nazianzus, steeped in Greek rhetoric, were able to create a Christian literature worthy of its classical antecedents. Gradually, then, the Hellenistic world became Christian, and Christianity became to a certain extent Greek. Then there came to birth the Byzantine culture of the East and the

Medieval culture of the West, both deeply imbued with Christian faith and Greek culture. And how could we not mention the approach of Saint Thomas who, in rereading the works of Aristotle, proposed a masterly theological and philosophical synthesis?

Raphael's painting "The School of Athens" in the Vatican Palace makes clear the contribution of the school of Athens to the art and culture of the Renaissance, a period which led to a great exchange between classical Athens and the culture of Christian Rome.

4. Hellenistic culture is characterized by its attention to the education of the young. Plato insisted on the need to train the mind of the young to seek the good and the honourable, as well as to respect the principles of divine law. How many Greek philosophers and writers, beginning with Socrates, Aeschylus and Sophocles, invited their contemporaries to live "in accordance with the virtues"! Saints Basil and John Chrysostom did not neglect to praise the value of the Greek educational tradition, for its concern to develop the moral sense of young people and to help them to choose freely what is good.

The fundamental elements of this long tradition remain valid for the people, including the young people, of our own time. Among the most sure elements are the moral aspects contained in the Hippocratic Oath, which emphasizes the principle of unconditional respect for human life in the maternal womb.

Greece is also the country in which two great sporting traditions, the Olympic Games and the Marathon, were born. Through these competitions a significant conception of the human person is expressed, in the harmony of the spiritual and bodily dimensions, through disciplined effort, marked by moral and civic values. We can only rejoice that to see that these competitions endure and continue to create close bonds among the peoples of the world.

5. The inculturation of the Gospel in the Greek world remains an example for all inculturation. In its relations with Greek culture, the proclamation of the Gospel had to make a careful discernment, in order to receive and evaluate all its positive elements, and at the same time to reject aspects which are incompatible with the Christian message. In this we have a permanent challenge for the proclamation of the Gospel, in its encounter with the various cultures and with the process of globalization. All of this calls us to engage in respectful and honest dialogue, and requires a new solidarity which evangelical love is capable of inspiring, bringing to fulfilment the Greek ideal of the *cosmopolis* in a world which is truly united and imbued with justice and fraternity.

We are in a decisive period of European history, and I hope most fervently that the Europe now emerging will rediscover this long tradition of encounter between Greek culture and Christianity in fresh and imaginative ways, not as the vestige of a vanished world but as the true basis for the genuinely human progress that our world seeks.

Carved on the façade of the Temple in Delphi were the words "Know yourself"; I appeal therefore to Europe to know herself ever more deeply. Such self-knowledge will come only in so far as Europe explores afresh the roots of her identity, roots which reach deep into the classical Hellenistic patrimony and into the Christian heritage which brought to birth a humanism based upon the vision of every human person as created in the image and likeness of God.

6. Geography and history have set your country, Mr President, between East and West, and this means that Greece's natural vocation is to build bridges and a culture of dialogue. Today this is essential for Europe's future. Many walls have been broken down in recent times, but others remain. The task of integrating the Eastern and Western parts of Europe remains complex; and there is still much to be

done to bring harmony between the Christians of East and West, so that the Church can breathe with both her lungs. All believers should see themselves as having a duty to work for this objective. The Catholic Church in Greece desires to share loyally in this noble cause, which also has positive effects in the social sphere. From this point of view, a significant contribution is made by the schools in which the younger generation is trained. Schools are *par excellence* places where the integration of young people of different backgrounds takes place. The Catholic Church, in harmony with the other Churches and religious confessions, desires to cooperate with all citizens for the education of the young. She wishes to continue her long educational experience in your country, especially through the activities of the Marist Brothers and the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Ursuline Sisters and the Sisters of Saint Joseph. These different religious families have shown that, with tact and respect for the cultural traditions of the young people entrusted to them, they are able to educate men and women to be true Greeks among the Greeks.

At the end of our meeting, I once more thank you most warmly, Mr President, for your welcome, and at the same time I express my gratitude to all who have made possible my pilgrimage in the footsteps of Saint Paul. I ask God to bestow upon the people of your country his abundant blessings, so that in the third millennium Greece may continue to offer new and wonderful gifts to the continent of Europe and to the family of nations!

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR  
OF GREECE TO THE HOLY SEE**

**September 2, 2002**

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to welcome you, Excellency, to the Vatican for the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Hellenic Republic to the Holy See.

I thank you very much for conveying to me the courteous message of President Constantinos Stephanopoulos. With delight I recall his visit to me in the Vatican last January and I would be grateful if you would express my cordial best wishes for him, as well as for all of the Greek people.

2. Mr Ambassador, at the beginning of our exchange, I would like to recall the visit to your country that I made last year, during my Jubilee pilgrimage in the steps of St Paul. Grateful to God who granted me the grace to make this much desired journey, I cherish a vivid memory of the warm welcome of the President and the Greek authorities. I warmly recall my meeting with His Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and of All Greece. On the particularly evocative site of the Areopagus, we assessed the painful memories of the past, but especially, we asserted our common desire to do our best to advance on the path of Christian brotherhood and the recovery of unity. I hope that the meeting of Athens will be an important stage on the long road that lies ahead; the recent visit to Rome of a delegation of the Orthodox Church of Greece confirms me in this hope.

3. Your country is deeply attached to the Christian faith which is one of the constitutive elements of the nation. It knows this religious heritage is living at the heart of Europe, not just as a historical memory which is justifiably an important element of its culture, but also as a source that can bring dynamism and future prospects to the building of Europe. On various occasions I have expressed my concern in this regard and, especially, my regret at seeing that no explicit mention was made of the communities of religious believers among the partners who are to contribute to the reflection on the "Convention" established at the Laeken Summit with a view to a possible European Constitution. As I recalled to the Diplomatic Corps: "The marginalization of religions, which have contributed and continue to contribute to the culture and humanism of which Europe is legitimately proud, strikes me as both an injustice and an error of perspective. To recognize an indisputable historical fact in no way means to disregard the modern demand for States to have an appropriate non-confessional character, and therefore Europe as well!" ([\*Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See\*](#), 10 January 2002, n. 2; *ORE*, 16 January 2002, p. 3).

I am sure, Mr Ambassador, that your country can play an important role within the institutions of the Community to ensure that they recognize and express in a satisfactory way the religious dimension to which the Holy See and the Hellenic Republic are equally attached.

4. For more than 20 years now Your country has been a member of the European Union that recognizes that Greece has made a special contribution to the continent since the time of the foundation of the first Athenian democracy, especially on the social, cultural and religious levels which are part of its long tradition. I am delighted with the attention that the Greek authorities have paid to the enlargement of Europe, in particular to the Balkan countries. It is obvious that this opening to the other European nations will make it possible to put a permanent end to any risk of confrontation in the region, so that the tragic conflicts which bathed the end of the 20th century in blood will never

happen again. The gradual acceptance of all the countries will consolidate with their peoples a culture of peace and solidarity which is one of the strengths of the European project.

The Holy See, as you know, calls forcefully for the establishment of a solid and lasting peace among nations, and supports all that can enable different peoples to meet, to speak to one another and to put into practice common projects for the good of all the inhabitants.

In this perspective, the forthcoming Olympic Games that will be held in Athens in 2004, will be an opportunity for a new experience of brotherhood, to overcome hatred and to bring together persons and peoples. On this occasion, I make a heartfelt appeal for a lasting truce from all violence, so that the peaceful spirit and healthy competition, which the founders of the Olympic Games had in mind, may spread to all areas of society and to all continents. In our troubled and sometimes uncertain world, I hope that this sports event may be a joyful witness to the fact that all belong to the same human, fraternal and supportive community, as recent sporting events have shown.

5. Through you, I would like to greet warmly the Catholic faithful who live in Greece. They are a small minority and often dispersed in small communities. They are still in a difficult position regarding the recognition of their rights within the nation and at the different levels of society. I therefore take this opportunity once again to draw your Government's attention to the need, through a constructive dialogue between the leaders concerned, to give the Catholic Church legal standing. Indeed, it would be right, as is the case in all the countries of the European Union, to ensure full respect for the effective religious freedom of Catholics, as well as for other believers, giving the dioceses and local communities the means they need for their mission. For their part, Catholics look forward to having a real dialogue with their Orthodox brothers and sisters, and their only concern is to share fully, in their proper capacity, in the economic, political and social life of the country in which they are already deeply involved. I encourage the Catholic community and its Pastors, bishops and priests, the men and women religious who are devoted to its service, and all the faithful who are members to persevere in this regard. May they all be assured of the support and fraternal prayer of the Bishop of Rome, Successor of Peter.

I also cordially greet the pastors and faithful of the Orthodox Church of Greece, expressing to them once again my gratitude for their welcome during my visit, and I once again assure you of the Catholic Church's desire for dialogue, a dialogue which, as I have recently repeated, must take place not only at the level of fraternal charity, but above all in the theological sphere.

6. Mr Ambassador, at the time when you are beginning the noble mission of representing your country at the Holy See, please accept my best wishes for its success, and be sure that you will always find here with my collaborators the necessary understanding and support!

Upon your Excellency, upon your family, upon all those who work with you and upon all your compatriots, I cordially invoke an abundance of divine Blessings.

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THREE GROUPS OF PILGRIMS****December 13, 2003**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am very happy to meet with you and cordially welcome each one.

I greet, in the first place, Hon. President Mario Pescante and the members of the 49 *European Olympic Committees*, participating in the annual Assembly of the International Olympic Committee. I welcome this occasion to emphasize once again the value and importance of sport, especially in the formation of young people. Europe is the cradle of modern sport, descended from the athletic training of the ancient Greeks marked by reciprocal respect and friendship. May the well-known motto of modern Olympics - "*Citius, Altius, Fortius*" - continue to be imprinted on the athletic activity of the new generations.

## ADDRESS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ITALIAN SPORTS CENTRE June 26, 2004

Dear Friends of the Italian Sports Centre,

1. Welcome to this meeting that commemorates the 60th anniversary of your praiseworthy institution, founded to evangelize the world of Sport in Italy. I welcome you and I greet you all with affection. I greet the Prelates present, starting with Cardinal Camillo Ruini, President of the Italian Bishops' Conference. I am especially grateful to him for describing your Association's programmes and projects to me just now. I greet your directors, trainers, referees and umpires, leaders and chaplains. I extend a cordial greeting to Mons. Vittorio Peri, the [Italian] National Ecclesiastical Consultant, and to Mr Edio Costantini, the National President. Above all, I greet you, dear young athletes, and thank you for your warm welcome.

2. "Arise" (Lk 7: 14). I would like on this occasion to take up the Lord's invitation to the young man of Nain, which was the theme of my recent Apostolic Pilgrimage to Switzerland, to reflect also with you on the meaning of your mission in the Church and in society.

*"Arise! Listen! Set out!"*. I addressed these words to the young people at the Ice Palace of Bern this past 5 June. I repeat the same invitation to you, dear friends of the Italian Sports Centre. Each one of you is called to follow Christ and to be his witness in the context of sport.

You are well aware of this unique vocation and, as your Association's cultural and sports programme states, you mean not only to promote sport within Italian society but also to contribute to answering the fundamental questions the new generations are asking about the meaning of life, its purpose and its goal. You thus intend to promote a sporting mindset and culture which, by actually "doing sport" and not only "talking about sport", will help people rediscover the full truth about the human person.

3. The Italian Sports Centre came into existence 60 years ago with this goal: to propose to young people, then marked by the appalling consequences of the Second World War, the practice of sports, not only as a source of physical well-being but as an ideal of life, courageous, positive, optimistic and a means for the integral renewal of the individual person and of society. My venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Pius XII, then asked your Sodality to be the leaven of Christianity in stadiums, on roads, on mountains, at sea, wherever your banner is raised with honour (cf. *Address to the Italian Sports Centre*, 1955).

In the course of the years, dear friends, you have tried to stay faithful to this behest, presenting the Italian Sports Centre as a school for authentic human formation. You have toiled to acquaint children, young people and adults with the riches and beauty of the Gospel, through various types of sports. You have helped them to encounter Jesus and choose him as their ultimate *raison d'être*.

4. Still today this is your mission, and society still needs it. The efforts of your sports' association to promote sport as a formative experience in the parishes, schools and throughout the territory, will help the young generations to choose and to foster the authentic values of life: love for truth and justice, the taste for beauty and goodness, the search for genuine freedom and peace.

In our time, organized sport sometimes seems conditioned by the logic of profit, of the spectacular, of doping, exasperated rivalry and episodes of violence. It is also your task to proclaim and to witness to the humanizing power of the Gospel with regard to the practise of sport, which if lived in accordance with the Christian outlook, becomes a "generative principle" of profound human relations

and encourages the building of a more serene and supportive world. I hope that you, especially, dear young athletes, will practise sport with loyalty and a healthy spirit of competition. In this way it will help you to face the demanding competition of life with courage and honesty, with joy and with calm confidence in the future.

Through Mary's intercession, I entrust the entire family of the Italian Sports Centre and all its projects for good to the Lord, and I bless you all with affection.

## **SPORT AND TOURISM: TWO LIVING FORCES FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING, CULTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETIES**

### **Message of John Paul II for the 25th World Day of Tourism September 27, 2004**

1. On the occasion of the forthcoming World Day of Tourism that will be celebrated on 27 September, I am pleased to address all who work in this sector of human activity to offer them several thoughts that highlight the positive aspects of tourism. As I have already pointed out on other occasions, tourism improves relationships between individuals and peoples; when they are cordial, respectful and based on solidarity they constitute, as it were, an open door to peace and harmonious coexistence.

Indeed, much of the violence that humanity suffers in our times is rooted in misunderstanding as well as in the rejection of the values and identity of foreign cultures. Therefore, it would often be possible to get the better of these situations thanks to a better reciprocal knowledge. In this context I am also thinking of the millions of migrants who must play a participatory role in the society that hosts them, which is founded above all on appreciation and recognition of the identity of each person or group.

The World Day of Tourism, therefore, not only offers a fresh opportunity to reinforce the positive contribution of tourism to building up a more just and peaceful world, but also to a deeper reflection on the concrete conditions in which tourism is organized and practiced.

In this regard, the Church cannot fail to repeat once again her essential views on humankind and on history. Indeed, the supreme principle that must govern human coexistence is respect for the dignity of each person, created in the image of God and thus a brother or sister to all.

This principle must guide all political and economic activity, as the social teaching of the Church has demonstrated. It must also inspire cultural and religious coexistence.

2. This year the theme of the World Day is "Sport and tourism: two living forces for mutual understanding, culture and the development of societies". Sport and tourism refer first and foremost to free time, in which activities must be encouraged that foster both physical and spiritual development. There are, however, many situations in which tourism and sport are specifically interrelated and condition each other, for instance, when sport actually becomes the main reason for travel at home or abroad. In fact, sport and tourism are closely linked in the great sporting events in which the countries of one or other region of the world compete, such as, for example, the Olympic Games, which must not relinquish their lofty aim of arousing ideals of coexistence, understanding and friendship.

3.

This also applies, however, in many other less spectacular cases, such as in school sports or the sports events organized by local associations. In other cases, the practice of a specific sport is the precise reason for planning a journey or holidays. Moreover, the phenomenon affects elite sportsmen and women, their teams and their fans, as well as modest social clubs and numerous families, young people and children, and lastly, those who make physical exercise one of the important reasons for traveling.

In addressing a human activity that involves so many people, the occurrence of abuse and corruption is not surprising, despite the nobility of the objectives proclaimed. Among other phenomena, we cannot overlook exacerbated commercialism, aggressive rivalry, violence to individuals and things even to the point of the degradation of the environment or offence to the cultural identity of the

host of the event.

4. St Paul the Apostle proposed the image of the athlete to the Christians of Corinth in order to illustrate Christian life and as an example of effort and constancy (cf. I Cor 9: 24-25). Indeed, the correct practice of sport must be accompanied by moderation and training in self-discipline. It very often also requires a good team spirit, a respectful attitude, appreciation of the qualities of others, honest sportsmanship and humility in recognizing one's own limitations. Sport, in brief, especially in its less competitive forms, is an invitation to a festive celebration and friendly coexistence.

The Christian can also find sports helpful for developing the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance in the race for the wreath that is "imperishable", as St Paul writes.

5. Of course, tourism has given a powerful impetus to the practice of sport. The facilities it offers, including many activities that it promotes or sponsors itself, have in fact increased the number of those who appreciate sports and practice them in their leisure time. Thus, there are more opportunities for encounter between different peoples and cultures in a climate of good understanding and harmony.

Therefore, without ceasing to pay due attention to the irregularities that regrettably continue to occur, I would like to urge you warmly and with renewed hope to promote a form of "sport that protects the weak and excludes no one, that frees young people from the snares of apathy and indifference and arouses a healthy sense of competition in them; sport that is a factor of emancipation for poorer countries and helps to eradicate intolerance and build a more fraternal and united world; sport which contributes to the love of life, teaches sacrifice, respect and responsibility, leading to the full development of every human person (Homily at the Mass for the Jubilee of the World of Sport, 29 October 2000, n. 3; L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 1 November 2000, p. 2).

With these thoughts, I invite those connected with sport in their own field of tourism, and likewise sportsmen and women and all those who travel on account of sports to continue their efforts to achieve these noble goals, as I invoke upon each one of them abundant divine Blessings.