



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE CHILDREN OF ITALIAN CATHOLIC ACTION

Consistory Hall

Thursday, 20 December 2007

Dear Boys and Girls of the [Italian] Children's Catholic Action (ACR),

I welcome you with great joy. Your visit today to the Pope's house means that we are now close to the great Feast of Holy Christmas, a Feast eagerly awaited, especially by you children. I offer each one of you my affectionate greeting, together with my warm thanks for the sentiments and prayers you expressed to me on behalf of your friends of ACR and of the entire large family of Italian Catholic Action. I address a special greeting to Prof. Luigi Alici, the National President, and to Bishop Domenico Sigalini, whom I recently appointed General Chaplain of Catholic Action. I also greet the Director and the Chaplain of ACR and their collaborators, extending my greeting to all those who are in charge of your human, spiritual and apostolic formation.

I am pleased that you just mentioned Antonia Meo, a little girl known as "Nennolina". Exactly three days ago, I decreed the recognition of her heroic virtues and I hope that her cause of beatification will soon be successfully concluded. What a shining example this little peer of yours left us! In her very short life - only six and a half years - Nennolina, a Roman child, showed special faith, hope and charity, and likewise the other Christian virtues. Although she was a frail little girl, she managed to give a strong and vigorous Gospel witness and left a deep mark on the diocesan Community of Rome. Nennolina belonged to Catholic Action: today, she would certainly have been enrolled in ACR! Therefore, you can consider her a friend of yours, a model to inspire you. Her life, so simple and at the same time so important, shows that holiness is for all ages: for children and for young people, for adults and for the elderly. Every season of our life can be a good time for deciding to love Jesus seriously and to follow him faithfully. In just a few years, Nennolina reached the peak of Christian perfection that we are all called to scale; she sped down the "highway" that leads to Jesus. Indeed, as you yourselves said, Jesus is the true "road" that leads us to the Father and to his and our definitive home, which is Paradise. You know that

Antonia now lives in God and is close to you from Heaven: you feel her present among you, in your groups. Learn to know her and follow her example. I think she would be pleased with this: with still being "involved" in Catholic Action!

It is Christmas and I want to offer you fervent good wishes of joy and serenity, but with these good wishes allow me to express another for the whole year that we will shortly be beginning. I do so inspired by your *slogan* for 2008: may you always walk joyfully on the road of life with Jesus. One day he said: "I am the way" (Jn 14: 6). Jesus is the way that leads to true life, life that never ends. It is often a narrow, uphill road, but if we let ourselves be attracted by him it is always marvellous, like a steep mountain path: the more steeply it rises, the better one can admire from on high new views even more beautiful and extensive. There is the effort of walking but we are not alone: we help each other, we wait for one another, we lend a hand to those who have been left behind.... The important thing is not to get lost, not to stray from the path, otherwise we risk ending in a ravine, of getting lost in the woods! Dear children, God became man to show us the way; indeed, by making himself a child he also became the "way" for you children: he was like you, he was your age. Follow him lovingly every day, keeping your hand in his.

What I am saying to you applies equally to us adults. I therefore hope that the whole of Italian Catholic Action will walk briskly and united on the road of Christ, to witness in the Church and in society that this road is beautiful; it is true that it demands commitment but it leads to true joy. Let us entrust this wish, which is also a prayer, to the maternal intercession of Mary, Mother of Hope, Star of Hope. May she who anxiously expected and prepared for the birth of her Son Jesus also help us to prepare for this Christmas in an atmosphere of profound devotion and deep spiritual joy. I accompany my dearest wishes with a special Apostolic Blessing for you who are present here, for your loved ones and for the entire family of Catholic Action. Happy Christmas!

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