



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

TO THE MEMBERS OF ITALY'S PRO-LIFE MOVEMENT Hall of Blessings

Monday, 12 May 2008 *Dear Brothers and Sisters,* With deep pleasure I welcome you today and I offer each one of you my cordial greeting. In the first place, I greet Bishop Michele Pennisi of Piazza Armerina, and the priests present. I address a special greeting to Hon. Carlo Carsini, President of the Pro-Life Movement and I warmly thank him for his kind words to me on your behalf. I greet the members of the National Management Committee and the Executive Board of the Pro-Life Movement, the Presidents of the Centres for Help to Life and those in charge of the various services, the "Progetto Gemma", the "Telefono Verde", "SOS Vita" and "Telefono Rosso". I also greet the representatives of the Pope John XXIII Association and several European pro-life movements. Through you who are present here I extend my affectionate thoughts to those who, although they are unable to be here in person are united with us in spirit. I am thinking in particular of the many volunteers who, with self-denial and generosity share with you the noble ideal of promoting and defending human life from its conception. Your visit is taking place 30 years since the legalization of abortion in Italy and you are intending to suggest a profound reflection on the human and social effects this law has produced in the civil and Christian communities during this period. Looking at the past three decades and considering the current situation, it is impossible not to recognize that in practice defending human life today has become more difficult because a mindset has developed, entrusted to the opinion of the individual, which has gradually debased its value. One result of this has been the decrease in respect for the human person, a value at the root of all civil coexistence, over and above the faith professed. The causes that lead to such painful decisions as abortion are of course many and complex. If, on the one hand, faithful to her Lord's commandment, the Church never tires of reaffirming that the sacred value of every human being's life originates in the Creator's plan, on the other hand, she encourages the promotion of every initiative in support of women and families in order to create the favourable conditions in which to welcome life, and the protection of the family institution founded on the marriage between a man and a woman. Not only has permitting recourse to the termination of pregnancy not solved the problems that afflict many women and a fair number of families, but it has also made another wound in our society, unfortunately, already burdened by deep suffering. In recent years, there has been great dedication, and not only on the Church's part, in order to meet the needs and difficulties of families. However, we cannot conceal from ourselves that various problems continue to gnaw at today's society, preventing space from being given to the desire of so many young

people to marry and to form a family, because of the unfavourable situation in which they live. The lack of steady employment, legislation that frequently does not provide for the protection of motherhood, the impossibility of guaranteeing adequate support for children, are some of the obstacles that seem to stifle the requirement of fertile love, while they open the door to a growing sense of distrust in the future. It is necessary, therefore, to join forces so that different Institutions may once again focus their action on the defence of human life and give priority attention to the family, in whose heart life is born and develops. It is necessary to help the family with every legislative means to facilitate its formation and its task of education in the difficult social context of today. For Christians, in this fundamental context of society, an urgent and indispensable field for the apostolate and for Gospel witness is always open: to protect life with courage and love in all its stages. For this, dear brothers and sisters, I ask the Lord to bless the activity which, as the *Centro di Aiuto alla Vita* and the *Movimento per la Vita*, you carry out to prevent abortion, also in the case of difficult pregnancies, working at the same time in the contexts of education, culture and political debate. It is necessary to witness concretely that respect for life is the first form of justice to apply. For those who have the gift of faith this becomes a mandatory imperative, because the disciple of Christ is called to be increasingly a "prophet" of a truth that can never be eliminated: God alone is the Lord of life. Every person is known and loved, wanted and guided by him. Here alone lies the deepest and greatest unity of humanity: in the fact that every human being puts into practice God's one plan, originates in God's same creative idea. One thus understands why the Bible says: whoever profanes man, profanes the property of God (cf. Gn 9: 5). This year is the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights whose merit is to have enabled different cultures, juridical forms and institutional models to converge around a fundamental nucleus of values, and hence, of rights. As I recently recalled [during my Visit to the United Nations Organization to the members of the U.N.](#), "Human rights, then, must be respected as an expression of justice, and not merely because they are enforceable through the will of the legislators.... The promotion of human rights remains the most effective strategy for eliminating inequalities between countries and social groups, and for increasing security" ([Address to U.N. General Assembly](#), New York, 18 April 2008). For this reason your commitment in the political arena, as a help and an incentive for Institutions so that proper recognition be given to the words "human dignity", is truly laudable. Your initiative with the Commission for Petitions of the European Parliament, in which you assert the fundamental values of the right to life from conception, of the family founded on the marriage of a man and a woman, of the right of every human being conceived to be born and brought up in a family by his parents, further confirms the solidity of your commitment and your full communion with the Magisterium of the Church, which has always proclaimed and defended these values as "non-negotiable". Dear brothers and sisters, in [meeting you on 22 May 1998](#), John Paul II urged you to persevere in your commitment of love and the defence of human life, and recalled that thanks to you, numerous children were able to experience the joy of the most precious gift of life. Ten years later, it is I who thank you for the service you have rendered to the Church and to society. How many human lives you have saved from death! Continue on this path and, in order that the smile of life may triumph on the lips of all children and their mothers, do not be afraid. I entrust each one of you, and the many people whom you meet at the Centres of help for life, to the

motherly protection of the Virgin Mary, Queen of the family, and while I assure you of my remembrance in prayer, I warmly bless you and all those who belong to the Pro-Life Movements in Italy, in Europe and throughout the world.

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