



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO A GROUP OF YOUNG ITALIANS,
CIVIL SERVICE VOLUNTEERS AND THEIR LEADERS**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 28 March 2009*

Dear Young People,

Welcome, and thank you for your appreciated visit. It is always a joy for me to meet young people; in this case I am even more pleased because you are volunteers in civil service, a characteristic that reinforces my esteem for you all. It also invites me to present certain reflections linked to your specific activity. First, however, I would like to greet the Undersecretary of the Office of the Prime Minister, Senator Carlo Giovanardi, who has promoted this meeting on behalf of the Italian Government. I also thank him for his kind words and likewise greet the other Authorities present.

Dear friends, what can the Pope say to young people involved in national civil service? First of all he can congratulate you on the enthusiasm that motivates you and the generosity with which you carry out your mission of peace. Then, may he be permitted to present to you a reflection which, I could say, relates to you in a more direct way. It is taken from the Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, "joy and hope" which concerns the Church in the contemporary world. In the last part of this conciliar document in which the theme of peace among peoples is also addressed is found a basic expression on which it is good to reflect: "Peace will never be achieved once and for all, but must be built up continually" (n. 78). How true this observation is! Unfortunately, wars and violence never cease and the search for peace is always demanding. In years marked by the danger of possible global conflicts, the Second Vatican Council forcefully denounced the arms race in this text. "The arms race, which quite a few countries have entered, is no infallible way of maintaining real peace", and it immediately adds: "the arms race is one of the greatest curses on the human race and the harm it inflicts on the poor is more than can be endured" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 81). The Council Fathers followed this troubled observation by expressing a hope: "New approaches, based on reformed attitudes, will

have to be chosen in order to remove this stumbling block, to free the earth from its pressing anxieties, and give back to the world a genuine peace" (*ibid.*).

"New approaches", therefore, "based on reformed attitudes" on the renewal of minds and consciences. Today as then, authentic conversion of hearts represents the right path, the only one that can lead each one of us and all humanity to the hoped-for peace. It is the path indicated by Jesus. He who is the King of the universe did not come to bring peace to the world with an army, but through the rejection of violence. He said so explicitly to Peter in the Garden of Olives: "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Mt 26: 52); and then he said to Pontius Pilate: "If my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world" (Jn 18: 36).

Not only Christ's disciples have followed this path but also many men and women of good will, courageous witnesses of the force of non-violence. Again in *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council said: "We cannot but express our admiration for all who forgo the use of violence to vindicate their rights and resort to those other means of defense which are available to weaker parties, provided it can be done without harm to the rights and duties of others and of the community" (n. 78). You too belong to this category of peacemakers, dear young friends. Therefore may you always and everywhere be instruments of peace, determinedly rejecting selfishness and injustice, indifference and hatred, to build and to patiently and perseveringly disseminate justice, equality, freedom, reconciliation, acceptance and forgiveness in every community.

I am pleased to extend to you here, dear young people, the invitation with which I ended my annual *Message for the World Day of Peace* last 1 January, urging you "to expand [your] hearts to meet the needs of the poor and to take whatever practical steps are possible in order to help them. The truth of the axiom cannot be refuted: 'to fight poverty is to build peace' (*Message for World Day of Peace 1 January 2009*, 8 December 2008). Many of you I am thinking for example of all those who work with *Caritas* and in other social organizations are involved daily in services to people in difficulty. But in every case, in the varied scopes of your activity, each and every one of you through this experience of volunteer work can reinforce their own social sensitivity, know others' problems from closer at hand and make of themselves active champions of concrete solidarity. This is surely the main objective of national civil service, a formative objective: to teach the young generations to cultivate a sense of responsible attention with regard to people in need and to the common good.

Dear young men and women, one day Jesus said to the people who were following him: "Whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospel's will save it" (Mk 8: 35). In these words there is not only a Christian but also a universally human truth: life is a mystery of love, which belongs to us the more we give of it. Indeed, the more we give *ourselves*, that is, make a gift of ourselves, of our time, our resources and our talents for the good of others. Thus states a famous prayer attributed to St Francis, which begins: "Lord, make me an instrument

of your peace" and concludes with these words: "for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life". Dear friends, may this always be the logic of your life; not only now when you are young but also in the future, when as I hope for you you will have meaningful roles in society and will form a family. Be people who are ready to expend themselves for others and who are prepared even to suffer for goodness and for justice. I assure you of my prayers for this as I entrust you to the protection of Mary Most Holy. I wish you a good service and bless you all wholeheartedly, together with your loved ones and the people whom you meet every day.

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