



The Holy See

*MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE DIOCESAN MODERATORS
OF ITALIAN CATHOLIC ACTION*

Dear Moderators of Italian Catholic Action!

1. I am happy to greet you on this occasion, that sees you gathered in Rome for your *National Convention on the theme: Renewing the Catholic Action Movement in the Parish*. In a special way I greet the General Moderator, Bishop Francesco Lambiasi, and the National President, Dr Paola Bignardi.

During these days, you will reflect on how the Catholic Action Movement can contribute to the beginning of the new millennium so as to recreate the face of the parish, the basic structure of the ecclesiastical body. Moreover, the two-thousand-year experience of the People of God, as the Second Vatican Council and the Code of Canon Law authoritatively confirmed it, teaches that the Church cannot give up her parish structures, that are communities of believers rooted in the neighbourhood, bound to each other around the Bishop in the network of diocesan communion.

The parish is "the home of the Christian Community" to which one belongs through the grace of Baptism. It is the "school of sanctity" for all Christians, even for those who do not belong to an ecclesiastical movement or do not practice a special spirituality. It is the "laboratory of faith". It is the "training ground of formation" where they are formed in the faith and brought into the apostolic mission.

Keeping in mind the rapid changes that came with the beginning of this millennium, it is necessary for the parish to feel a more urgent need to live up to and bear witness to the Gospel by creating a profitable dialogue with the people in the neighbourhood where they live or spend a great deal of their time, while paying special attention to those who live materially or spiritually deprived and wait for a word that will accompany them in their search for God.

2. The bond between the parish and the Italian Catholic Action Movement has always been tight. In the parish communities, the Catholic Action Movement anticipated a great deal of the pastoral renewal of the Council with prophetic intuition; and over the year has accompanied its implementation. It has brought to the parish the sensitivity and the requests of those who, in the routine of every day life, feel the effects of that change that touches every person before it affects communities, and concerns the places where people are living before it influences the organization of the pastoral ministry. Much remains to be done. Now 40 years since the opening of the Council, Vatican II continues to be "a sure compass" to guide the course of Peter's barque (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 57) and the conciliar documents represent "the holy door" through which each parish community must pass in order to enter into the third millennium of the Christian era not just chronologically, but also spiritually.

I am certain that the Catholic Action Movement will contribute to the indispensable work of renewing the parish through the daily witness of communion. It will be ready to lend its service to forming lay people who will be mature in faith and bring into every situation apostolic zeal for the mission. The real contribution that the Italian Catholic Action Movement can offer the Christian community is a spirituality of communion lived with the Bishop and the local Church. I would like to recall what I wrote on this subject in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*: "Before making practical plans, we need *to promote a spirituality of communion*, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up. A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us" (n. 43).

3. Only a renewed Catholic Action Movement can contribute to renewing the parish. For this reason, dear Moderators, lead the Association on the path of renewal, which was clearly outlined and courageously undertaken by your last National Assembly. Support it with your priestly ministry so that the "courage for the future" and the "creativity of holiness", which the Spirit of the Lord will certainly not fail to grant to the leaders and members, may make the Association ever more faithful to its missionary mandate.

I exhort you to contribute with the fruitfulness of your priestly ministry to promoting the vast and broad work of education that can bring the freshness of the Gospel to many people who often feel dissatisfied and agitated. To do this, it is essential to ensure for the Association leaders, teachers and well formed directors, and to raise up lay people with a strong apostolic drive who can take the message of the Gospel everywhere. This will enable the Catholic Action Movement to express again its own charism as an Association chosen and promoted by the bishops, by means of a direct and organic collaboration with their ministry for the evangelization of the world, through the formation and sanctification of its members (cf., Art. 2 *Statuto*).

On the occasion of the 11th National Assembly of your Association, I took the opportunity to emphasize how an authentic renewal of the Catholic Action Movement is possible through the "humble boldness" of setting one's gaze on Jesus who makes all things new. Only by keeping our eyes turned toward Him, are we able to distinguish what is necessary from what is not. I ask you to be the first to assume this contemplative vision in order to give witness to the newness of life that comes from it at the level of the person and the community. The indispensable structural and organizational renewal will be the result of a unique "adventure of the Spirit", who brings about an interior and radical conversion of persons and associations at the various levels of the parish, diocese and nation.

4. Beloved, put at the service of this formative and missionary endeavour your best energies, namely, the wisdom of spiritual discernment, the holiness of life, the variety of theological and pastoral responsibilities and the familiarity of simple and genuine relationships.

In the diocesan and parochial associations, be fathers and brothers who are able to encourage, to awaken the desire for an evangelical way of life, to support in the difficulties of life children, adolescents, young adults, families and the elderly. Take to heart the education of strong and free, wise and humble Christian personalities, who can promote a culture of life, justice, and the common good.

The Pope is close to you and encourages you not to lose heart, above all, when, combining the service of a Moderator with the other tasks in the Diocese, you start feeling the fatigue and complications of such a ministry. You may be sure: to be Moderators of Catholic Action, on account of the unique relationship of co-responsibility inherent in the experience of the Association, makes it a source of fruitfulness for your apostolic work and your holiness of life.

Lastly, I want to take this opportunity to invite all the priests "not to be afraid" to welcome into their parish the associative experience of Catholic Action. In fact, they will find in it not just valid and motivated support, but also a closeness and spiritual friendship, together with the richness that comes from sharing spiritual gifts with every member of the Community.

I entrust these hopes - like those which each of you carries in his heart to the intercession of Mary, the Mother of the Church, and, upon you and all the priests who together with you exercise the ministry of Moderator for Catholic Action in the Italian Church, I cordially bestow my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 19 February 2003

JOHN PAUL II
