



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON THE PASTORAL CARE OF GYPSIES

Thursday, 9 November 1989

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*1. During these days you have been pondering on the problem of the vocation and mission of the Gypsies in the Church and in the world. The subject is very important and timely, and questions, not without uneasiness, our human and Christian society. In fact, the presence of these people, for the most part nomadic, and in any case scarcely integrated in the society of work and culture, regardless of the ferments that agitate them, especially those religious in nature, require an adequate response and commitment. In the area of the Church's teaching, always aware of peoples problems, all discrimination against the Gypsies is unjust and harsh, because it is clearly against the teachings of the Gospel, for which each man is a Son of God, and a brother of Christ. Therefore, Paul VI was right when in 1965, at Pomezia, on meeting them on the occasion of their first international pilgrimage, which brought them to the Tomb of the Apostles, he said: "You are in the Heart of the Church, because you are poor, because you are alone" (*Teachings of Paul VI*, 111, 1965, pp. 491-492). For this reason, dearest ones, the responsibility and your commitment is large and worthy, because you take upon yourselves the living conditions and concerns of travellers. In fact, I would like to say that you have, that we all have also, a lot to learn in our contacts with them. They have suffered much and still suffer due to privations, insecurities and persecutions, and for this reason they have a lot to say. Their wisdom is not written in a book, but is no less eloquent for this reason. But it is up to you to make them part of your care and of your human and Christian culture.2. Notwithstanding the Gospel's clear teaching, to which I have referred, it is often true that Gypsies are rejected and despised. The world, which is for the most part marked by the avidity of profit and contempt for the weakest, must change its behavior and receive our nomadic brothers not simply with tolerance, but with a fraternal spirit. Your action, whether it be educative - in the form of literacy - or in the nature of assistance, health or justice, will allow those who have a social *handicap*, in particular Gypsies from another country, to take their place in society which is theirs by right. But this prospect is still a long way off. The Gypsies, too dispersed, too weak or simply not organized, need to be helped to become aware of their dignity and their responsibility. You have all become especially concerned with these itinerants, complete the praiseworthy task of knowing them, and let them be known as they really are and not as they are now so ungenerously imagined to be. Study their history, their psychology, their language, share their joy and their suffering, and it is at this price that you can help them achieve their calling in the Church and in the world. You must, in particular, bring them proof of your faith, share with them the bread of the Gospel. The discovery of the Word of God, above all on the part of the young, will allow them to fully develop their role and respond to the appeal made by the Word

of Jesus Christ. I am sure that you will all make invaluable use of this meeting for the realization of a common and detailed work program. Such an effort could be followed, if you think it opportune, by an even closer collaboration between all of you, and a closer relationship with the Church hierarchy.³ I wish you success in helping more effectively our Gypsy brothers not to feel abandoned on their way. Even the Church is on its way to the end of time. On it she has left her marks as points of reference the local Churches, with their living communities, and their shrines are sure points of reference for those seeking protection and defense amid so many difficulties. May the good heavenly Mother, to which the Gypsy world is especially devoted, always bless your activities and accompany you on the high ways of the world. ©

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