



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO VOLUNTEER WORKERS**

Saturday, 8 March 1997

1. I am pleased to welcome you, dear Italian volunteers who are members of the “Hospitalité Notre Dame de Lourdes”. I greet you with affection, together with the members of the Committee of the Archconfraternity, who wished to accompany you. I also extend my greeting to the members of the Boston College Chorale, who have come from the United States of America.

This meeting offers me a fitting occasion to underscore *the value of hospitality*, an essential and distinctive dimension of Christian charity, the work of mercy that the disciples of Christ —as individuals, as families and as communities — are called to perform in joyful obedience to the Lord's command.

2. Because of modern conditions of life, the values of acceptance and hospitality, present in every culture, risk being weakened and lost: they are actually delegated to organizations and structures that specifically provide for them. Even if this responds to appropriate organizational demands, it must not be reflected in a lessening of our sensitivity and attention to our neighbour in need. Professional hospitality is certainly valuable, but it should not be at the cost of that *culture of hospitality* which draws its deepest motivation from the word of God and as such remains the patrimony of the entire People of God.

As an example of this, I like to recall the passage in the Book of Genesis which tells of *Abraham* and the three mysterious guests at the oaks of Mamre (cf. Gn 18:1-10). In the likeness of three passing strangers, the ancient patriarch welcomed God himself. Hospitality finds its fulfilment in *Christ*, who welcomed our humanity in his divine person, becoming as the liturgy says, “*a guest and pilgrim among us*” (*Roman Missal* [Italian edition], Common Preface VI).

3. Dear brothers and sisters, as your activity also testifies, hospitality acquires special importance *with regard to the pilgrimage experience*, especially when the pilgrims are the ill or very elderly, who need special attention. How many *saints* have achieved the perfection of charity precisely by assisting the sick with that love which only Christ, received in the Eucharist and served in one's brother, is able to communicate!

One of the important aspects in the *preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000* is that of deepening our *spirit of hospitality*. Every ecclesial community is called to develop this dimension, by opening its heart and making room in it for all those who knock on its doors. Thus, for every particular Church the Holy Year is a providential opportunity for conversion to the Gospel, for welcoming and serving the sick and suffering.

4. Welcoming our brothers and sisters with care and willingness must not be limited to extraordinary occasions, but must become for all believers a *habit* of service in their daily lives. In this regard, dear brothers and sisters, your active involvement in the *pastoral care of the sick*, as carried out in your Dioceses, is truly commendable. It expresses your desire to prolong the experience of the pilgrimage to Lourdes in the everyday life of the Church.

I therefore encourage you to continue generously in your commitment, always in active communion with the Bishops. With the wish that your service may be a source of holiness for you and of real comfort to the people you assist, I invoke the special intercession of your patroness, Our Lady of Lourdes.

5. I am also happy to greet the *Boston College University Chorale* and to wish you a pleasant stay in the city of Sts Peter and Paul. I hope that your visit will help you to be sensitive to the need to deepen your attachment to authentic Christian values and a transcendent vision of life's meaning. Belonging to the University Chorale surely brings you much satisfaction, and I pray that it will also help you to develop a deeper spiritual life through praise of God in song. May the Lord bless you all; and take my greetings to your families and friends.

6. On this day, *8 March*, dedicated to reflection on the dignity and role of *woman*, I wish to address a thought to all the women of the world, especially to those who unfortunately find themselves in situations of marginalization and discrimination. *May every woman be able fully to express the richness of her personality in the service of life, peace and authentic human development!*

To you all, dear brothers and sisters, I again express my appreciation for this welcome visit and impart my cordial Apostolic Blessing.

