



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO MEMBERS OF THE ITALIAN PRO-LIFE MOVEMENT**

Friday, 22 May 1998

1. Welcome, dear Brothers and Sisters, members of the Pro-Life Movement. You have come to Rome from various Italian cities once again to renew your "yes" to the fundamental value of life and to give a voice to the many innocents whose right to be born is jeopardized. I affectionately greet Bishop Elio Sgreccia, Vice-President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, and the movement's President, Mr Carlo Casini, whom I thank for his strong, beautiful words to me on behalf of you all. I also greet all who in these years have actively worked to defend and promote human life.

As I recalled in the Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*: "Humanity today offers us a truly alarming spectacle, if we consider not only how extensively attacks on life are spreading but also their unheard-of numerical proportion, and the fact that they receive widespread and powerful support from a broad consensus on the part of society, from widespread legal approval and the involvement of certain sectors of health-care personnel" (n. 17).

With profound sorrow we must observe that these serious phenomena also occur in Italy, where in the last 20 years no less than three and a half million babies were killed with the approval of the law, in addition to those destroyed illegally. However, in view of these disturbing figures, your presence, in large numbers and with great conviction, is an encouraging sign which nourishes the hope that truth will triumph over the false justifications given for abortion. The truth is that every human being has a right to life from his conception until his natural end. For the faithful the hope that this truth will prevail finds its basis in Christ, who died and rose again, and who sends his Spirit into the world to instil courage and to raise up tireless defenders and witnesses of truth and life.

2. Encouraging signs also come today from those who observe the failure of permissive abortion laws at the political level. Not only have they failed to eliminate illegal abortion, but, on the contrary, they have contributed to the growing decline in the birth rate and, not infrequently, to the degeneration of public morality. These data highlight the urgent need for a commitment to the promotion and defence of the family institution, the first resource of human society, especially with regard to the gift of children and the affirmation of women's dignity. In fact, there are many who, in consideration of

the dignity of woman as a person, wife and mother, see permissive abortion laws as a defeat and humiliation for woman and her dignity.

Another encouraging sign is your work, dear members of the Pro-Life Movement: as a result of the widespread and timely commitment of the *Aid Centres* you sponsor, it has been possible to save over 40,000 babies and to assist an equal number of women. This promising result demonstrates that where concrete support is offered, despite problems and influences which are sometimes critical, women are able to make the sense of love, life and motherhood triumph within them.

Your praiseworthy commitment has had a positive influence on the consciences of individuals, where often "the eclipse of the sense of God and of man, with all its various and deadly consequences for life, is taking place" (*Evangelium vitae*, 24) and on the "moral conscience of society", which "is responsible, not only because it tolerates or fosters behaviour contrary to life, but also because it encourages the culture of death, creating and consolidating actual structures of sin which go against life" (*Evangelium vitae*).

The network of concern for unborn life, which your Movement has been able to construct, attracting the attention of political institutions and broad levels of society, lets us think that if the action of so many volunteers, supported with more explicit solidarity, were allowed in public health structures, it would achieve even greater results for many innocent lives.

I hope that parishes and Dioceses will treasure your experience in order to set up organized structures for aiding the life not only of unborn children, but also of adolescents, the elderly and people who are alone and abandoned.

3. Concrete help and widespread educational activity, which involve the entire ecclesial community, must be accompanied by political efforts for the full recognition of the dignity and rights of the unborn child and for the revision of laws that legalize its suppression. No human authority, not even the State, can morally justify the killing of the innocent. This tragic transformation of a crime into a right (cf. *Evangelium vitae*, n. 11) is a sign of the disturbing decadence of a society.

Actually, in addition to striking at the law impressed by the Creator on the heart of every man, permissive abortion laws express an incorrect form of democracy, present a reductive concept of society and reveal a lack of commitment by the State to the promotion of values.

Effective action in this area must, therefore, aim at reconstructing a horizon of values, which translates into a clear affirmation of the "right to life" in international charters and national laws.

4. On the other hand, economic and social progress cannot have a sure foundation and concrete hope if there is a basic refusal to acknowledge the right to life. There is no future for a society that is incapable of duly appreciating the wealth represented by a newborn child and of valuing a woman's vocation to motherhood.

As I recalled in the Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, in the modern world there is "a surprising contradiction. Precisely in an age when the inviolable rights of the person are solemnly proclaimed and the value of life is publicly affirmed, the same

right to life is being denied or trampled upon, especially at the more significant moments of existence: the moment of birth and the moment of death" (n. 18).

In view of such ambiguous positions, I wish to stress that respect for life from its conception until natural death is the essential issue in the modern social question. The lack of such respect in developed societies has serious consequences in developing countries, where pernicious anti-birth campaigns are still promoted, and it is especially apparent in the area of artificial human procreation and the euthanasia debate

5. Dear brothers and sisters of the Pro-Life Movement, persevere in your courageous efforts! Every sacrifice and every hardship will be compensated by the smile of the many children who, thanks to you, can enjoy the priceless gift of life. I warmly encourage you to make every effort so that everyone's right to life will be recognized and an authentic democracy, inspired by the values of the civilization of love, will be built.

I entrust each of you and all your good projects to Mary, "Mother of the living", and, as I assure you of a daily prayer, I gladly impart to you and your endeavours my Apostolic Blessing.

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