



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE ORGANIZERS AND PARTICIPANTS  
IN THE 83RD GIRO D'ITALIA CYCLE RACE**

*Friday 12 May 2000*

*Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

*Dear organizers, promoters and participants in the Giro d'Italia!*

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the eve of the popular cycle race, which, starting tomorrow, will see many of you as protagonists on the roads of this peninsula. In extending my most cordial welcome to you all, I thank in a special way Dr Cesare Romiti and Dr Candido Cannavò for the kind words that they wished to address to me in the name of those present, words which evoke the ideals and values that inspire this great sporting event.

I extend a particular greeting to the participants in the cycling Relay of Our Lady of Ghisallo, who have come to Rome for the start of the Giro d'Italia, in remembrance of the 50th anniversary of the proclamation, by my Venerable Predecessor Pius XII, of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Ghisallo as the principal patron saint of Italian cyclists.

The esteem, interest and admiration that your historic cycle race has always aroused not only among sports enthusiasts but also among radio and television journalists, as indeed among ordinary people, has made the Giro d'Italia a high-profile sporting event with a great social impact on Italian history and habit.

2. This year's race, coinciding with the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, has special significance. As was fittingly recalled a few moments ago, the Giro d'Italia will start in Rome, ending its first stage in St Peter's Square. We could say then that tomorrow's segment is not just a "prologue" to the Giro d'Italia, but forms a "first stage" in the Jubilee of Athletes, which, please God, we will have the joy of celebrating together on the last Sunday of October at the Olympic Stadium.

This connection between sporting events and Jubilee celebrations highlights the relationship which

must always join sports and spiritual values. Indeed it must serve as an important opportunity for reflection and renewal, so that sports may shine with those characteristics of transparency, consistency, honesty and sharing which make it one of the significant vehicles of lofty human values.

In fact every sport, at both the amateur and the competitive level, requires basic human qualities such as rigorous preparation, continual training, awareness of one's personal limits, fair competition, acceptance of precise rules, respect for one's opponent and a sense of solidarity and unselfishness. Without these qualities, sport would be reduced to mere effort and to a questionable, soulless demonstration of physical strength.

3. Even the legitimate search for technical means that are ever more effective and better suited to the race conditions must always be put at the service of the athlete and not vice versa, by avoiding unnecessary risks or those that injure the competitors or the spectators.

When sports are played and understood in the right way, they are an extraordinary expression of a person's best inner energies and of his ability to overcome difficulties, to set himself goals to be reached through sacrifice, generosity and determination in facing the difficulties of competition.

Outstanding examples of all this are the noble athletes who have made cycling a great sport in Italy and in the world. At this time our thoughts naturally turn to Gino Bartali, recently deceased, a great sportsman, an exemplary citizen and a convinced believer. His example continues to be a reference-point for everyone of how sport can be practised with great human and spiritual energy, making it a shining expression of the highest values of life and of social harmony.

4. Dear friends, I wish all of you, who are about to start the Giro d'Italia, to participate in this important sporting event with a real sense of "sportsmanship", that is, with great competitive passion, but also with a strong spirit of solidarity and sharing.

May you be guided and assisted by the heavenly protection of Mary, to whom the month of May is particularly dedicated, and whom you invoke as your special patron under the beautiful title of Our Lady of Ghisallo. May you also be accompanied by my Blessing, which I affectionately impart to all of you here, to the organizers and to everyone participating in this cycling event, as well as to the entire sporting family of the Giro d'Italia.

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