



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS
OF THE CHRISTIAN OFFICE FOR THE DISABLED**

Saturday, 13 November 2004

Dear Friends of the Christian Office for the Disabled,

1. I am pleased to welcome you here with your Foundress, Marie-Hélène Mathieu, on the occasion of the pilgrimage you are making to celebrate the 40th anniversary of your association. I would like to give thanks with you for your work with disabled persons and their families that demonstrates the incomparable value of every life.

Through your attention to people afflicted with a disability, you remind our contemporaries that people cannot be reduced to their aptitude or financial status, but are God's creatures whom he loves for their own sake and not for what they do.

My affectionate prayers also reach out to their parents and to everyone who accepts to welcome a disabled person. I know of the sacrifices that this involves but I also know the joy of seeing happiness on the face of a disabled person and the affection that the disabled show to those who care for them.

2. Your activity is both a service and a genuine mission for the promotion of the human person and the defence of each one's dignity. This is clear from the theme of your pilgrimage: *You have chosen us to serve in your presence*. You carry out in the heart of the Church a meritorious service of charity, tenderness and compassion among the disabled and their families who have "put on the face of Christ", as St Gregory of Nyssa says of all the poor (cf. *Love of the Poor*).

You are one of the signs of the solidarity that the entire Christian community shows to those who are injured in body and in mind; you are also a reminder that Christ came to give life in abundance

to every man and woman and to reveal to us that salvation is for everyone, as he proclaimed in the Synagogue at Nazareth (cf. Lk 4: 14-21). As the Second Vatican Council aptly stressed: "The spirit of poverty and charity is the glory and witness of the Church of Christ" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 88).

3. Your presence invites me to make another pressing appeal to all people of good will, particularly those with a role in the government or legislation, to alert their consciences and humanity. I appeal for the protection of every human life, especially the lives of the frailest, lowliest and poorest; and also for an end to all acts whose aim is to eliminate defenceless unborn children, for by so doing man makes himself the master of life. To scorn the life of little ones is, in a certain way, to scorn our own humanity, for we are bound by the same brotherhood and the same solidarity.

As I ask Our Lady of Lourdes to sustain you in your mission, I impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing to you and to all the members of the *Office Chrétien des Handicapés*, to their families and to all who are involved in your activity.