

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE
"CENTESIMUS ANNUS PRO PONTIFICE" FOUNDATION**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Today's meeting is connected to the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Vatican Foundation, "*Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice*", that provides a singular response to the invitation I offered in the Encyclical which has inspired this group, to promote and defend the knowledge and the practice of the Church's social doctrine.

The generous availability of qualified lay faithful and of the various entities expressive of the great tradition of the Catholic Movement in Italy came into contact with the fervent initiative of Cardinal Rosalio Castillo Lara, then President of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See. This resulted in the foundation of your very institution, whose goal is to combine the task of spreading the teaching of the Church in social matters, especially in the world of professionals and entrepreneurs, with the concrete help offered to the Pope for the charitable interventions for which he is continually solicited from all parts of the world and for the assistance to the instruments of which he avails himself for his universal ministry.

The past 10 years have seen the consolidation of the Foundation, the development of study and formation projects - among which is particularly appreciated the *Master's* in Social Doctrine, promoted in collaboration with the Pontifical Lateran University - the organization of groups of adherents on Italian territory and the start, rich in perspective, of linked units in other countries as well.

I cannot but rejoice at all this, while I feel I must express a special "thank you" to those who have contributed to putting annually at my disposal precious resources for my evangelical solicitude toward the whole world.

2. I encourage you to continue in your undertaking, always keeping before you three great convictions:

a) *The permanent timeliness of the social doctrine of the Church.*

The dramatic events that disturb the modern world and the deplorable conditions of underdevelopment which still engulf many Countries, with terrible consequences for their inhabitants, for their fragile institutions, for the natural habitat, mean that one really must start again from a concrete perspective: the truth about man which is discovered by reason and confirmed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that proclaims and promotes the true dignity and the innate social vocation of the person.

The social teaching of the Church progressively deepens the different aspects of that truth, also in the face of the signs of the times and with the changes of the cultural and social scenes; and offers indirect incentive for the promotion of human laws, for the tutelage of the family, for the development of truly democratic and participatory political institutions, for an

economy at the service of man, for a new international order that guarantees justice together with peace among the peoples, for an ever more responsible moral attitude towards creation, also at the service of future generations.

b) *The proper responsibility of the Christian laity.*

Reintroduced with great clarity by the Second Vatican Council and highlighted by me many times with conviction in the acts of my Magisterium, such responsibility rightly finds in the social doctrine of the Church a necessary, productive and exalting reference point. The Council speaks of "commitment, direction, and vigour to establish and consolidate the community of men according to the law of God" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 42). This task is proper and unique to the lay faithful, called to focus the light that comes from the Gospel on the many social realities and, with the power infused by Christ, to undertake to "humanize" the world. It is surely a great responsibility that should be seen by the Christian laity not as a limited obligation, but as a generous and creative mission.

c) *The awareness that only new men are able to make all things new.*

One should not ask of economic, political or social institutions what they are not able to give. Every true newness is born of the heart, from a conscience illuminated and empowered to true liberty by the living encounter with the One who has said: "I am the way, and the truth and the life" (Jn 14: 6) and "Apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15: 5).

The social commitment of the Christian laity can therefore be fed and made consistent, powerful and courageous only by a profound spirituality, that is, by a life of intimate union with Jesus, who makes one capable to express the great theological virtues - faith, hope and charity - through the work of the difficult responsibility of building a society closer to the great, providential design of God.

3. In offering these guidelines for your expanding task with respect, with hope and with affection, I wish to renew my heartfelt thanks to the president, Count Lorenzo Rossi di Montelera, to the members of the Administrative Council, to the founders, to all the members and to the ecclesiastics who accompany you on your way.

With these heartfelt sentiments I invoke on each one of you and on your loved ones plentiful heavenly gifts, as a pledge of which I impart to all my Blessing.

From the Vatican, 5 July 2003

JOHN PAUL II