



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE 25th WORLD DAY OF TOURISM
(27 September 2004)**

***Sport and tourism: two living forces
for mutual understanding, culture and the development of societies***

1. On the occasion of the forthcoming World Day of Tourism that will be celebrated on 27 September, I am pleased to address all who work in this sector of human activity to offer them several thoughts that highlight the positive aspects of tourism. As I have already pointed out on other occasions, tourism improves relationships between individuals and peoples; when they are cordial, respectful and based on solidarity they constitute, as it were, an open door to peace and harmonious coexistence.

Indeed, much of the violence that humanity suffers in our times is rooted in misunderstanding as well as in the rejection of the values and identity of foreign cultures. Therefore, it would often be possible to get the better of these situations thanks to a better reciprocal knowledge. In this context I am also thinking of the millions of migrants who must play a participatory role in the society that hosts them, which is founded above all on appreciation and recognition of the identity of each person or group.

The World Day of Tourism, therefore, not only offers a fresh opportunity to reinforce the positive contribution of tourism to building up a more just and peaceful world, but also to a deeper reflection on the concrete conditions in which tourism is organized and practised.

In this regard, the Church cannot fail to repeat once again her essential views on humankind and on history. Indeed, the supreme principle that must govern human coexistence is respect for the dignity of each person, created in the image of God and thus a brother or sister to all.

This principle must guide all political and economic activity, as the social teaching of the Church has demonstrated. It must also inspire cultural and religious coexistence.

2. This year the theme of the World Day is "*Sport and tourism: two living forces for mutual understanding, culture and the development of societies*". Sport and tourism refer first and foremost to free time, in which activities must be encouraged that foster both physical and spiritual development. There are, however, many situations in which tourism and sport are specifically interrelated and condition each other, for instance, when sport actually becomes the main reason for travel at home or abroad. In fact, sport and tourism are closely linked in the great sporting events in which the countries of one or other region of the world compete, such as, for example, the Olympic Games, which must not relinquish their lofty aim of arousing ideals of coexistence, understanding and friendship.

This also applies, however, in many other less spectacular cases, such as in school sports or the sports events organized by local associations. In other cases, the practice of a specific sport is the precise reason for planning a journey or holidays. Moreover, the phenomenon affects both elite sportsmen and women, their teams and their fans, as well as modest social clubs and numerous families, young people and children, and lastly, those who make physical exercise one of the important reasons for travelling.

In addressing a human activity that involves so many people, the occurrence of abuse and corruption is not surprising, despite the nobility of the objectives proclaimed. Among other phenomena, we cannot overlook exacerbated commercialism, aggressive rivalry, violence to individuals and things even to the point of the degradation of the environment or offence to the cultural identity of the host of the event.

3. St Paul the Apostle proposed the image of the athlete to the Christians of Corinth in order to illustrate Christian life and as an example of effort and constancy (cf. I Cor 9: 24-25). Indeed, the correct practice of sport must be accompanied by moderation and training in self-discipline. It very often also requires a good team spirit, a respectful attitude, appreciation of the qualities of others, honest sportsmanship and humility in recognizing one's own limitations. Sport, in brief, especially in its less competitive forms, is an invitation to a festive celebration and friendly coexistence. The Christian can also find sports helpful for developing the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance in the race for the wreath that is "imperishable", as St Paul writes.

4. Of course, tourism has given a powerful impetus to the practice of sport. The facilities it offers, including many activities that it promotes or sponsors itself, have in fact increased the number of those who appreciate sports and practice them in their leisure time. Thus, there are more opportunities for encounter between different peoples and cultures in a climate of good understanding and harmony.

Therefore, without ceasing to pay due attention to the irregularities that regrettably continue to occur, I would like to urge you warmly and with renewed hope to promote a form of "sport that protects the weak and excludes no one, that frees young people from the snares of apathy and indifference and arouses a healthy sense of competition in them; sport that is a factor of emancipation for poorer countries and helps to eradicate intolerance and build a more fraternal and united world; sport which contributes to the love of life, teaches sacrifice, respect and responsibility, leading to the full development of every human person (*Homily at the Mass for the Jubilee of the World of Sport*, 29 October 2000, n. 3; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 1 November 2000, p. 2).

With these thoughts, I invite those connected with sport in their own field of tourism, and likewise sportsmen and women and all those who travel on account of sports to continue their efforts to achieve these noble goals, as I invoke upon each one of them abundant divine Blessings.

From the Vatican, 30 May 2004, Solemnity of Pentecost.

JOHN PAUL II