



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE 31st SQUADRON OF THE ITALIAN AIR FORCE**

Sunday, 21 September 1997

Dear Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers of
the 31st Squadron of the Italian Air Force,

1. I am especially pleased to welcome you today, together with your families. The traditional and cordial greeting that you usually extend to me on this occasion gives me the opportunity to express my gratitude to you for the careful and punctual service that you provide for the Pope on his flights throughout Italy.

I especially thank you, Colonel, for your thoughtful gift and for the courteous words with which you have conveyed the sentiments of all those present. I have learned from what you said that you are about to end your service as Commander of the 31st Squadron. As I express my sincere appreciation of the work you have carried out and of the courteous availability you have so constantly shown, I offer you my very best wishes for the new responsibilities that will be entrusted to you.

2. As a sign of gratitude to the entire Squadron I wish now to decorate some of you with Papal Honours as a sign of my appreciation and esteem.

The delicate task you are called to carry out frequently enables you to leave the earth physically and to fly in the open skies, where your eyes sweep far distances and you can immerse yourselves in a clear, pure atmosphere. This experience can help you see things with different eyes and be freed from a narrow vision of daily events. It also invites you to consider the

greatness of God, whom our faith symbolically situates in the heavens, while affirming that the entire universe is unable to contain his immensity.

In pointing to the skies, the Church urges every person to regard the things of the passing world with respectful detachment but also with loving care, keeping ever in his mind and heart our common and ultimate homeland in heaven, where we will find Christ seated at the right hand of the Father.

Dear friends, while navigating the broad horizons of the sky, cultivate these sentiments of faith, which will suggest to you the right way to deal with earthly affairs. May God always enlighten you and protect you in your every task.

As I entrust you and your loved ones to the motherly protection of the Blessed Virgin of Loreto, patroness of aviators, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to your families.

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