

Dear brother and sister,

I'm happy to welcome you on the occasion of your Assembly. In particular way, I greet your President and the President of the International Committee, and I thank them for their kind words. Through you, I would like to express my appreciation for all those who at the European level are committed through sports to caring for the development of person and the building of fraternal relationships in society.

The Church's interest in the world of sports has grown over time, for she regards sport as a significant means of fostering the integral growth of the human person. Sporting activities help us to look beyond ourselves and our self-centred interest; sport trains us in a spirit of sacrifice and, if properly focused, they build up loyalty in our interpersonal relationships, friendships and respect for rules. It is important that those involved in sport, at various levels, promote those human and religious values which are the foundation of a society built on justice and solidarity. This is possible because sport is a universal language which surpasses borders, languages, races, religions and ideologies. It has the capacity to bring people together, encouraging dialogue and acceptance. This is a very precious resource!

I wish to encourage institutions and organizations such as yours, which propose sport – especially to the younger generation – as a way of training for peace, mutual sharing and harmonious coexistence of peoples. Sport tends to unite rather than divide! The symbol and flag of the Olympic Games – five interlocking rings – represent the fraternity characterizing the Olympic Games, and indeed sporting competition in general.

When sport is viewed solely in economic terms or as the pursuit of victory at all cost, we run the risk of reducing athletes to mere products from which to profit. Athletes themselves enter into a system that sweeps them away; they can lose the true meaning of their activity, that joy of play which attracted them as young people and which drove them to make so many sacrifices to become champions. Sport is harmony, but if the immoderate pursuit of money and success take over, this harmony can be lost.

In your work, dear Olympic Committee members, you are called to promote sports as a form of education. We are, all of us, aware of great need to form athletes inspired by uprightness, moral strength and a lively sense of responsibility.

I offer all of you cordial best wishes for your work. Upon you, your relatives and all who will take part at the next Olympic Games, and indeed upon all your other initiatives, I invoke the Lord's blessings.