



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE CHURCH OF SAINT ANTHONY OF THE PORTUGUESE IN ROME

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

22 May 1979

*Lord Cardinal Patriarch and revered Brothers in the Episcopate,
Your Excellencies,
Beloved sons and daughters of "most faithful" Portugal,*

May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all!

I greet you cordially with appreciation and gratitude for the joy of this meeting. And through you, particularly through the beloved bishops, my brothers, and the ambassadors, I greet the beloved Portuguese people.

Love of Christ has gathered us here with the purpose of praising and thanking God. The reason is a call and a response that reach us through eight centuries. The call made by my predecessor Alexander III in the Bull *Manifestis Probatum*, to your first king Don Alfonso Henriques, was addressed to Portugal and said: "Submissive and devoted to the Holy Roman Church, engaged in... the expansion of the frontiers of Christian faith: may the Apostolic See always rejoice in such a devoted and glorious son and rest in your love" (Bull *Manifestis Probatum*, 23 May 1179; Lisbon, Torre do Tombo, Codices de Bulas, m. 16, doc. 20). And the response was given by the people of Portugal throughout its history.

On this significant date, here in the church of St Anthony of the Portuguese in Rome, very near St Peter's tomb, among the reasons for common rejoicing—as the Cardinal Patriarch stated in his address—in our praise of God there stand out the relations between Portugal and the Apostolic See in eight centuries of history passed together.

What characterized this path as a whole can perhaps be summed up as follows: *faithfulness* to the Church, Mother and Teacher of peoples, on the part of Portugal, from the time that its first king, by means of his letter (*Claves regni*, Letter to Pope Lucius II, 13 December 1143) offered the Portuguese land to the Roman Church; and *good will* on the part of the Holy See which even granted Portugal the title of "most faithful" in the person of its Sovereigns (Benedict XIV, Bull *Charissime in Christo* to the king of Portugal Don Juan V, 17 December 1748. *Bullarium Romanum*, Venetiis 1778, t. II, page 1).

In the select representation that I contemplate here today praying with the Pope, I see the heritage and identity of Christian Portugal, with ancient and renewed faithfulness, with past and present aspirations. They are known to God and at this moment I leave in my heart the respectful evocations and due mentions of persons and facts that marked, in your country, the life of the Church, one and unique, concerned, always and everywhere, about man's vocation in Christ (cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 18).

In our liturgy of thanksgiving to the Lord, I would like to mention briefly three coordinates of the trajectory of faithfulness to God and to the Church in the Christian life and piety of the beloved Portuguese people, as so many other reasons for rejoicing in the Lord and for stimulation for the future. These coordinates are:

— It is no mere chance that Christ, the Redeemer and Saviour, figures as an eloquent symbol in the corners of the flag of your country, and that his cross distinguished the 16th-century caravels bound for glorious adventures, also because of "Christian daring" (Luis de Camoes, *Lusidas*, canto VII, 14).

— The Blessed Virgin, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, Our Lady, as you prefer to call her, who, in "the Lusitanian home" and "land of St Mary", passed at a certain moment from being "Lady" to being "Queen of Portugal" (cf. Document of proclamation of Our Lady of Conception, as Patron Saint of Portugal, in the Cortes of Lisbon, in 1646. Quoted by Fr Miguel Oliveira in his *Historia ecclesiastica de Portugal*, Lisbon 1958; pages 333 and ff.).

— The experience of an essential dimension of the Church, which is missionary by her very nature (*Ad Gentes*, 1): the work of evangelization carried out is one of the most genuine religious glories of Portugal.

In the light of the past, this agreeable meeting of today—Portugal of the present and the present of the Church in your country with the Successor of St Peter—is a resolution of continuity in the line of your faithfulness. Would that, seeking the common good—the supreme law of society, according to God—all Portuguese may dedicate themselves to cultivating spiritual values in a social climate of morality, justice, peace and brotherly love.

Yes, beloved Portuguese: cultivate personal dignity, preserve the good family spirit and respect life and the Lord of life and Lord of history. May you, living and bearing witness to your option for Christ, continue to listen to your epic writer and "do a great deal in holy Christianity" (Luis de Camoes, *Lusiadas*, canto VII, 3).

In you present here I bless your land and your people—persons, families and communities—and their leaders, thinking also of your emigrants and, with particular affection, of my brother bishops. The Pope loves you all and trusts in you.

And concentrating our minds and hearts on Christ "for whom and by whom all things exist" (Heb 2:10) in this Eucharist and through the mediation of Our Lady and of the saints of your land, let us continue praising, thanking and supplicating God the Father for Portugal, united in the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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