



The Holy See

Mr President,

Your visit this evening represents the latest of many contacts between the United States of America and the Holy See. A number of your predecessors, and many other illustrious Americans, have been welcomed here before you. Our meeting offers me the opportunity to reciprocate the much appreciated hospitality that I received in your country, and to recall the kind personal attention that as Vice President you showed me as I left Detroit in September 1987, the year of the Bicentennial of your Constitution.

Our encounter at this time has also a special historical context, coming as it does in a year that now commemorates the two-hundredth anniversary of your first Congress under the Constitution and likewise the two-hundredth anniversary of the establishment at Baltimore of the first Catholic diocese in your land. For the Holy See this is an occasion to express again its esteem for all the American people and for two centuries of that ethnic and fraternal experience in history called "United States of America".

Thirteen years ago your country celebrated another historical Bicentennial – connected with your Declaration of Independence. It was then that my predecessor Paul VI spoke words that are applicable once again and that merit new attention. "At every turn", he said, "your Bicentennial speaks to you of moral principles, religious convictions, inalienable rights given by the Creator... We earnestly hope that... this commemoration of your Bicentennial will constitute a rededication to those sound moral principles formulated by your Founding Fathers and enshrined forever in your history". It is America's dedication to the great heritage that is hers – to those values of the spirit, a number of which you alluded to earlier this year in your Inaugural Address, that offers hope and confidence to those who look to her with friendship and esteem.

In that Inaugural Address, Mr President, you made reference to power as existing "to help people", "to serve people". This is true at different levels, including power at the political and economic level. We see this too at the level of each community with its power of fraternal love and concern. In all these areas an immense challenge opens up before the United States in this third century of her nationhood. Her mission as a people engaged in good works and committed to serving others has horizons the length of your nation and far beyond – as far as humanity extends.

Today the interdependence of humanity is being reaffirmed and recognized through world events. The moral and social attitude that must constitute a response to this interdependence is found in worldwide solidarity. In treating this question in a recent Encyclical, I have stated that solidarity “ is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all ”. Truly, the hour of international interdependence has struck. What is at stake is the common good of humanity.

Mr President, I know how deeply committed you are to the efforts being made to liberate the youth of America from the destructive forces of drug abuse and to alleviate poverty at home and abroad. Material poverty and drug abuse, however, are only symptoms of a deeper moral crisis eating away at the very texture of society in almost every part of the world. All men and women of good will are called to take up the challenge and assume their responsibilities before the human family to address this crisis and to counteract the “ spiritual ” poverty that lies at the basis of so much of human suffering.

By reason of her history, her resources, her creativity – but above all by reason of the moral principles and spiritual values espoused by her Founding Fathers and institutionally bequeathed to all her citizens – America truly has the possibility of an effective response to the challenges of the present hour: justice for all her citizens, peaceful relations beyond her borders, international solidarity and in particular a worldwide solidarity in the cause of life, in the cause of every human person.

In leaving Detroit and in saying goodbye to America in 1987, I expressed this thought: “ Every human person – no matter how vulnerable or helpless, no matter how useful or productive for society – is a being of inestimable worth created in the image and likeness of God. This is the dignity of America, the reason she exists, the condition for her survival – yes, the ultimate test of her greatness: to respect every human person, especially the weakest and most defenseless ones, those as yet unborn”.

Mr President: may God bless America and make her strong in her defense of human dignity and in her service to humanity.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana