



# The Holy See

---

## **LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II TO CARDINAL ANTONIO MARÍA ROUCO VARELA**

*Cardinal Antonio María Rouco Varela*

*Archbishop of Madrid*

*President of the Spanish Episcopal Conference*

I learned that the faithful of the Dioceses of San Sebastián, Bilbao and Vitoria, as well as of the Archdiocese of Pamplona, led by their Pastors, are to gather with other men and women of good will at a prayer meeting in Campas de San Prudencio (Vitoria) on Saturday, 13 January, to ask God for peace and an end to terrorism. On this occasion I spiritually join all who will gather there, offering my prayer that everyone will be radically and sincerely converted to the holy law of God, the basis of peaceful coexistence and of respect for the rights of every person. A just and harmonious understanding will thus be re-established among individuals, families and peoples in the Basque Country, in Navarre and throughout the beloved Spanish nation, which have been deeply affected by the severity of the current situation caused by the terrorist violence that has continued for years.

The much longed-for social peace is above all a gift from the Saviour, whose coming we have just celebrated especially at Christmas: Christmas in the year of the Great Jubilee of his Incarnation. On those days, as we heard again the announcement of the angels at Bethlehem (cf. *Lk 2: 14*), we believers expressed our conviction that Christ alone is "our peace" (*Eph 2: 14*), thereby reaffirming that he himself is the Father's gift of peace to all humanity. By destroying sin and hatred and calling everyone to harmony and brotherhood, he came to unite what was divided; he is therefore the "head and exemplar of that renewed humanity, imbued with brotherly love, sincerity and spirit of peace, to which all men aspire" (*Ad gentes*, n. 8).

On this occasion I would like to encourage the Christian communities who make Jesus Christ present in their lives and action to grow in union with him and to intensify their trusting and persevering prayer for peace. Our pleas will make each of us an instrument of peace, a sower of harmony, an artisan of forgiveness. In a society marked by strong tensions, it is the mission of the particular Churches in territories that unfortunately suffer so frequently from the wound of terrorism to promote unity and reconciliation by rejecting every form of violence, terror and blackmail, since it is society as a whole that suffers from these sad situations.

First of all, our voices must be raised once again on behalf of the value of life, security, physical integrity and freedom.

Indeed, human life "cannot be seen as an object to do with as we please, but as the most sacred and inviolable earthly reality. There can be no peace when this most basic good is not protected. It is not possible to invoke peace and despise life" (*Message for the World Day of Peace 2001*, n. 19).

Christian communities must be privileged places of acceptance and of generous commitment to authentic peace, by helping to remove obstacles, tear down walls, encourage initiatives and projects in collaboration and social dialogue with the many individuals and groups who are concerned to achieve peace. In this task, it is essential to keep young people in mind: they must be taught the culture of peace always and everywhere: at school and university, in the workplace, in their free time and in sports. Interior and exterior peace, peace always, peace with everyone, peace for everyone. I would like to say to them and to all society: *Indarkeria ukatuz, pake zale, pake eskale ta pake egile izan zaitetzte*. (Reject violence and be friends of peace, people who pray for peace and build peace).

May God in his mercy grant social peace to the Basque Country, to Navarre and to all Spain! With a new manner of living, let us be worthy of this divine gift! May my blessing and affection always accompany everyone who is committed to this extraordinary and necessary task of achieving peace, of ending terrorism and violence and of fostering development and coexistence in justice and truth.

*From the Vatican, 6 January 2001, Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord and the close of the Great Jubilee.*