



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,
MEXICO AND THE BAHAMAS

MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Thursday, 25 January 1979

*Mr President,
Brothers in the Episcopate,
Brothers and Sisters,*

I thank God for allowing me to arrive at this piece of American land, the beloved land of Columbus, in the first stage of my visit to a continent to which my thought has so often flown, full of esteem and trust, particularly in this initial period of my ministry as Supreme Pastor of the Church.

The aspiration of the past becomes reality with this meeting, in which so many sons of this dear Dominican land participate—and so many others will have desired to do so—with enthusiastic affection. On its behalf and on your own, Mr President, you have wished to bid me a cordial welcome with significant and noble words. I respond to them with sentiments of sincere appreciation and deep gratitude, a sign of the Pope's love for the sons of this hospitable nation.

But in the words I have listened to and in the joyful welcome that the Dominican people gives me today, I also hear the voice, distant but present, of so many other sons of all the countries of Latin America, who, from the lands of Mexico to the extreme south of the continent, feel united with the Pope by extraordinary ties which touch the depths of their being as men and as Christians. Let one and all of these countries and their sons, receive the most cordial greeting, the homage of respect and affection of the Pope, his admiration and appreciation for the stupendous values of

history and of culture which they preserve, the desire for an individual, family, and community life of increasing human prosperity, in a social climate of morality, justice for all, and intense cultivation of spiritual goods.

An event of very great ecclesial importance brings me to these lands. I arrive in a continent in which the Church has left deep traces, which penetrate deep down in the history and character of each people. I come to this living portion of the Church, the most numerous one, a vital part for the future of the Catholic Church, which amid fine achievements but not without shadows, amid difficulties and sacrifices, bears witness to Christ. And today it desires to answer the challenge of the present moment, by proposing a light of hope for this life and for the next one, through its work of proclaiming the Good News which is summed up in Christ the Saviour, the Son of God and the elder Brother of men.

The Pope wishes to be close to this evangelizing Church in order to encourage its effort, to bring it new hope in its hope, to help it to discern its paths better, developing or changing what is necessary in order that it may be more and more faithful to its mission: that received from Jesus, that of Peter and his successors, that of the Apostles and of those who succeed them.

And since the Pope's visit wishes to be an enterprise of evangelization, I desired to arrive here by the route which, when the Continent was discovered, was followed by the first evangelizers: those religious who came to proclaim Christ the Saviour, to defend the dignity of the natives, to proclaim their inviolable rights, to promote their complete advancement, to teach brotherhood as men and as sons of the same Lord and Father, God.

This is a testimony of gratitude which I wish to render to the architects of that admirable action of evangelization, in this very land of the New World in which the first cross was planted, the first Mass was celebrated, the first Hail Mary was recited and from which, amid various vicissitudes, the faith spread to other nearby islands and from there to the mainland.

From this inspiring place in the Continent, a land of fervent love for the Blessed Virgin and of uninterrupted devotion to Peter's Successor, the Pope wishes to reserve his clearest memory and greeting for the poor, the peasants, the sick and the underprivileged, who feel close to the Church, who love her, who follow Christ even in the midst of obstacles, and who, with an admirable sense of humanity, put into practice that solidarity, hospitality, honest and hopeful gaiety, for which God is preparing his reward.

Thinking of the greater good of these kind and generous peoples, I trust that those in charge, the Catholics and men of good will of the Dominican Republic and of the whole of Latin America, will commit their best energies and expand the frontiers of their creativity to build up a more human and, at the same time, a more Christian world. This is the call that the Pope makes to you at this first meeting in your land.

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