



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF ALBANIAN PILGRIMS GATHERED IN ROME
ON OCCASION OF THE MARIAN YEAR**

Friday 6 May, 1988

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. It is with joy that I greet you, dear Albanian sons and daughters, who have come from various countries of Europe and America, on the occasion of the Marian Year. During your pilgrimage to the shrine of Genazzano, where according to tradition is venerated the picture of Our Lady of Shkodër, Patroness of Albania, it has been your desire to pause at the tomb of the Apostle Peter and to meet his Successor, in order to be “confirmed in the faith” (Cfr. *Luc.* 22, 32). You are indeed welcome here!

This meeting fills our hearts with emotion. I see in your faces the ancient pride of the Albanian people, but I also see your nostalgia for your homeland, “the land of the eagles”, a nation most noble by reason of ancient memories, illustrious traditions and long struggles for freedom. This land, geographically so near, is particularly dear to me. And how could it fail to be, since it preserves the memory of the presence of the Apostles Andrew and Paul, of the apostolic origin of Durrës, the first Episcopal see, the martyrdom of Saint Astius, and then, down the centuries, a long series of martyrs and confessors? How could I fail to have a particular affection for a nation whose Catholic community has always been faithful to communion with the Apostolic See, even in the most difficult and painful circumstances?

2. Dear brothers and sisters, today I wish to greet in you the whole people of Albania, with great respect and cordial friendship. I know your often tormented history. I know how rightfully proud you are of your fine traditions and customs. Every stage of your centuries-long history is marked by your resolve to affirm and defend your spiritual and cultural identity.

The Catholic faithful, together with the other sections of the national community, have shared in this impassioned commitment, which as it were constitutes the unifying motivation of the national community. Today, you bear convincing witness to this, for, though you are far from your homeland, you try to preserve the integrity and authenticity of the heritage of your tradition, in order to pass it on to the younger generation. What you do in order to preserve the Albanian language, culture and customs, even in the most varied surroundings, is a valuable contribution to your nation.

This is being done by the Catholics, who at one and the same time feel that they are affectionate and faithful children of Holy Mother Church and of their own land. And this is being done by the Church, which is not foreign to but incarnate in each people, whose values she makes her own, illuminating them with the light of the Gospel of Christ. For the obedience of faith finds a spontaneous expression in everything true, good and right that belongs to the heritage of each people.

3. In my Message for this year's World Day of Peace, I made a point of mentioning that religion, when it is lived in full freedom and in all its personal and community exigencies, constitutes a factor of communion of minds, of collaboration for the common good and of peace. Religion cannot be indifferent, and still less hostile, to the growth of the human person and of the civil community. For it offers the contribution of faith lived in charity, in solidarity, in mutual understanding, in witness to the truth, in the quest for peace.

In the different ages of your country's history, there have not been lacking particularly eloquent examples of this effective sharing on the part of the Catholic community – and its individual members – in the life, progress and independence of the nation. With all my heart I share with you the hope that the Church which for two thousand years has been rooted in Albanian soil may be able to enjoy freedom once more, in order to continue to be an element of national cohesion and a factor of unity and peace in the heart of your people.

4. Dear brother and sisters, in your fidelity to Christ and the Church I see proof that in the sons and daughters of Albania the aspiration to religious freedom is alive. In their name, in the name of the whole Church, I address a fresh appeal for the recognition of this fundamental need of the spirit.

In this Marian Year, and in the context of your pilgrimage, this invocation becomes a prayer.

Virgin of Shkodër, Patroness of Albania, our sweet Mother! You bear in your heart the lives of the peoples: look to this nation, which received the first proclamation of the Gospel from the Apostles, and which has always venerated you with tender filial love. Today too, in the darkness of trial, this nation has trusting recourse to your maternal help.

You precede the Church in the pilgrimage of faith: look upon your Albanian sons and daughters, as they experience the path of trial and tribulation. Sustain the weak, give comfort to the afflicted, keep the faith alive in the hearts of all.

Mother of the Saviour, bless the Christian families, which express a fundamental dimension of the Church of your Divine Son.

Mother of hope, hasten the day when this noble people can once more see recognized the deepest aspirations of its spirit, when all its sons and daughters will be once more united and in harmony, in the building of a future of justice and peace.

With my Apostolic Blessing.

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