



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO JAMAICA, MEXICO AND DENVER (COLORADO)
ON THE OCCASION OF THE EIGHTH WORLD YOUTH DAY
(AUGUST 8-16, 1993)

MEETING WITH THE VIETNAMESE CATHOLIC
COMMUNITY OF THE UNITED STATES

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

McNichols Sports Arena, Denver
Sunday, 15 August 1993

Dear Vietnamese Friends,

I remember my first presentation to the people of Rome, after the election of 1978. I addressed to them a brief speech in Italian and I said to them, "If I make a mistake, correct me". And so I repeat the same thing to you, and to your community of Vietnam. My dear secretary, Monsignor Vincent Thu, tried to teach me how to pronounce Vietnamese; but I'm not sure (if I'm pronouncing it correctly,) especially after so many speeches in such different languages. The only solution is to repeat the same (remark) which I said to the Roman community, the first evening, "If I make a mistake, correct me". And I suppose that it will be necessary to correct (my pronunciation) very much. So I will repeat the first phrase, "Dear Vietnamese Friends...".

1. My visit to Denver for the "*World Youth Day*" gives me this opportunity to meet you, members of the Vietnamese community of the United States, and to re-affirm *my pastoral solicitude and affection for the whole Vietnamese people*. I greet each one of you. I greet the community in exile, and I send a special word of esteem and friendship to your brothers and sisters in your homeland,

where many are listening to my voice through a radio link-up. I wish to assure you all of my constant prayers for the Church of the hundred and seventeen martyrs, for the poor, the sick, the refugees in the camps in Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Within the last two decades many of you left the land of your fathers, facing sufferings and trials of all kinds before you were finally safe and settled. Throughout those difficult circumstances, you found courage also in your faith in Jesus Christ. Now that conditions have improved, the challenge before you is to keep pure and lively your Catholic identity, never giving in to discouragement or sadness, or to attitudes and ways of behaving in contrast with your love of God. I know that you are active in preserving your national customs. We have seen them, at the beginning. Your attachment to your Vietnamese traditions, to your homeland, to your customs, to the beauty of your traditions. Thank you very much for this exhibition and that you make great efforts to keep the Vietnamese language alive among your children and young people. This is a way of showing your love for the homeland, for your own people's culture and history. It can also be an enrichment of the nation in which you have found a new home.

2. I am told that the Vietnamese community has many associations, organizations and movements, which promote cultural and social activities as well as spiritual and apostolic works. I wish to encourage you to maintain a great spiritual unity among yourselves, and to strengthen more and more the spirit of cooperation between all these different groups. *There is strength in unity*; there is only pain and scandal in division and conflict.

To the priests I extend a fraternal word of encouragement. Keep alive your commitment and dedication to your priestly ministry. Be Good Shepherds to the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care. In particular, encourage vocations to the priesthood and religious life among your fellow Vietnamese. Be promoters of the Catholic life of the community, through your parishes, organizations, meetings, spiritual retreats. Never fail to uphold and strengthen Christian charity and solidarity with all those in material or spiritual need.

To the Religious I wish to express the gratitude of the Church for the witness of your consecration and for the good that you do to so many. Be joyful witnesses to the justice and holiness of the Church, which you are pledged to serve with all your hearts and all your talents.

3. To all of you I make this appeal: *do not forget the Church in Vietnam*. Your brothers and sisters in the Faith offer you the example of their fidelity to Christ as they live the Gospel in the difficult situation of their country, and of their willingness to suffer for Christ's sake (Cf. Phil. 1: 29). You in turn can help them in the moral and material reconstruction of the Church's works of apostolate and service. They need your help to restore and rebuild churches, seminaries, convents, schools, hospitals, and other institutions – which have no other aim but to serve the needs of the Vietnamese people.

To the entire Vietnamese people I express my sincere affection. I admire the courage and tenacity with which they are trying to overcome the great obstacles resulting from the tragic experiences of the past. Perhaps the greatest challenge of the present is to heal any ill-feeling or divisions which have grown up between citizens of the same country. Too much suffering has left profound wounds. *Reconstruction will only be possible with the cooperation of everyone*, and this in turn calls for mutual respect, forgiveness and unity of purpose. All Vietnamese will be able to contribute to building a new and better society if civic and political structures correspond to the deepest aspirations of the people as a whole, aspirations to peace, justice and freedom. May the Vietnamese people, who have survived many moments of difficulty in the past, now succeed in giving their nation the development, progress and unity to which they aspire and to which they have a right.

4. I commend the whole *Vietnamese Catholic community* to the intercession of Our Lady of La-Vang. She is the loving Mother who appeared in 1798 to console the Christians persecuted by the Van-Than. Soon the Church in Vietnam, already consecrated to her Immaculate Heart, will celebrate the Bicentennial of that event. May the period of preparation for that Jubilee be a time of renewed fervor in faith and Christian living, a time of solidarity with the Catholic community in the homeland, a time to remember the past, but also *to prepare an even brighter future for the new generations of Vietnamese*. May they grow up with healthy pride in their national origin, the riches of their culture, the spiritual greatness of their forebears who stood firm in the face of trials of all kinds.

May our Lord Jesus Christ sustain you all in faith, hope and love.

May he bless your families with fidelity, harmony and joy.

God bless the Vietnamese people!

I remember your visit, especially for the canonization of the Vietnamese martyrs in June, 1988. Many Vietnamese pilgrims came to Rome, but not from Vietnam, but from Europe, from America, from several countries and continents of the world. And I remember also our meeting in the afternoon with a similar problem, like this of today. Then I appreciated very much the visit of your brothers and sisters from Vietnam. In Rome, sometimes they come to my chapel for the private Mass and they are singing a special liturgical song in Vietnamese. So I am still in spiritual contact with your nation, with your homeland, with your Church, especially through the presence of Monsignor Vincent Thu, in my house as private secretary of the Pope.

And then I should say in conclusion that I meet many Bishops from different countries where the refugees who have emigrated from Vietnam are present and they constitute everywhere, a very solid part of the Catholic community.

God bless you; remain faithful to your Vietnamese identity, to your Christian identity, everywhere in the world. Thus you will prepare the future of Vietnam, and you will prepare the future of the Church in Vietnam.

Once again, thank you very much for this invitation. Sia lodato Gesu Cristo. Thank you.

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