



The Holy See

*Discurso al Embajador de PORTUGAL,
Excmo. Sr. Don Antonio d'OLIVEIRA PINTO DA FRANCA**

17 de febrero de 1996

Mr. Ambassador,

As I receive the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Portugal to the Holy See, I welcome you with great pleasure and offer you my best wishes for the fruitful and successful outcome of your mission.

1. On this occasion, I offer a grateful and deferential greeting to the President of the Republic, Dr Mario Soares, for appointing Your Excellency and for his kind greetings which you convey at this time of the «changing of the guarda» in this high post. It coincides with his retirement from government service, during which on several occasions I was the object of his attention and for which I am grateful. I pray God to bless him and his family with complete happiness. I remember that during my second visit to Portugal he kindly accompanied me to the Shrine of Fatima. I went there with the desire once again to show my filial gratitude to Our Lady, for the motherly care with which she watches over men's destiny and progress.

I was also accompanied by the beloved Portuguese people, with the expressive eloquence of their faith and trust in the Virgin Mary. Your Excellency wished to recall their past and present, marked by sentiments of loyal unity and sincere devotion to the Successor of Peter, through his respectful address. Thank you! At this time, may I address a fraternal greeting to all the Catholic faithful in Portugal, as well as to their dedicated Pastors.

2. Your Excellency, I see that in assuming your new duties, you are inspired by the idea of serving the «age-old and fruitful relations» which exist between Portugal and the Holy See, guided by the love of peace and justice which directs your country's international activity. It is not necessary for me to tell you that in this you can rely on my co-workers' full understanding and support.

Indeed, all those who work sincerely for the integral development of human society will find in the Catholic Church a co-worker who professes not only real respect for the dignity of each one of the world's nations and for their cultural wealth but who even more so never tires of recalling, for their own good, that the different cultures can and must complement each other within the unity of the great human family.

3. I am grateful to you, Mr. Ambassador, for the importance you gave in your address to the Catholic Church's constant commitment to furthering peace and understanding everywhere, defending constructive dialogue between the interested parties as the only way to overcome differences and conflicts. To promote dialogue and solidarity between individuals and peoples is a duty of all nations and one of the most urgent moral needs of our time. By its own presence in the international community, the Holy See seeks to encourage and support this dialogue, especially with regard to the spiritual and ethical values which are the essential basis of a just society and of a true and lasting peace.

These are principles which your own country shares. They have served in various situations of which the most recent concerns East Timor, whose inhabitants "are still waiting for proposals capable of allowing the realization of their legitimate aspirations to see their special cultural and religious identity recognized (Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 13 January 1996, n. 5; L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 17 January 1996, p. 2). I implore all those who have at heart or who are involved in the Timor problem, to do his part to facilitate and support the dialogue which has been started. I am convinced that Portugal will be able to invest the best - I am quoting - of its «capacity for dialogue and respect for the identity of others, possible only with the strength of a sound humility», which its history has demanded and taught. I appeal to the courage of the friends and servants of peace!

Lastly, Mr. Ambassador, I would like to mention the emotion you feel at arriving in Rome on the threshold of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which must be - as I hope and pray insistently - an event of grace and salvation for the Church and for the world. It will demand from both and from others, that they seriously «[meet] the challenge of secularism», in order to broach «the vast subject of the crisis of civilization, which has become apparent especially in the West, which is highly developed from the standpoint of technology but is interiorly impoverished by its tendency to forget God or to keep him at a distance» (Apostolic Letter Tertio millennio adveniente, n. 52). Portuguese society, I am certain, in its different classes and members, and in fidelity to its history and the example of its ancestors, will know how to accept this challenge, with courage and freedom from preconceptions deriving from a non-religious and amoral vision of the person and the human community.

As I bring this meeting to a close, I repeat my cordial wishes that your lofty mission which begins today may be crowned with success. I entrust your person, your loved ones, your co-workers and

all Portuguese society to Almighty God, invoking upon everyone an abundance of heavenly favors through the intercession of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, who, 350 years ago, was chosen by Portugal to be served and honoured as patroness and queen in the Shrine of Vila Viçosa, through the voice of its highest civil authority and with the explicit adherence of the nation's representatives. May God bless and protect Portugal!

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n.10 p.4.*

© Copyright 1996 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana