



The Holy See

*ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI TO THE PRESIDENTE OF VENEZUELA**

Saturday, 20 November 1976

Mr. President,

With real pleasure we bid you a most hearty welcome today, on this occasion of the first official visit of a President of Venezuela to the Holy See.

On this memorable occasion we would like above all to offer, through you, as the President of the nation, our tribute of respect, deep admiration and particular esteem for a country to which the Holy See feels so closely united by special ties.

It is a question of a bond which touches the depths of a people which is entering dynamically into its history, its peculiar configuration and the manifestations of that secret threshold in which the human being goes beyond himself, called to higher goals.

We know very well that Venezuela, a country of deep Christian character, rich tradition and great hopes, on the way to reaching the maturity of a great modern nation, is generously making an effort fruitfully to utilize, as the new times demand, all the riches with which the Creator lavishly endowed it. And we see with satisfaction how the country, consistent with its historical and spiritual traditions, is endeavouring to base its action on a programme of complete civil welfare, which will fully satisfy the rightful and deepest aspirations of the individual and the community.

In this sense due recognition goes to the efforts aimed at extending not only the technical or economic programme but also the moral, cultural and social programme to all human groups and, in particular, to those in greatest need of aid and assistance, such as natives and immigrants, whom Venezuela always wishes to treat with a generosity worthy of deep gratitude.

This ennobling effort, which raises difficult problems for those in charge of public affairs because of its scope and its impact on civil society, and which is trying to extend itself without any discrimination to all sectors of the community, must not be exhausted in the obligatory and eager pursuit of some higher levels of social life, but must be open to those wide horizon, in which man, really such in the full sense, free from conditionings and hindrances which prevent his gradual acquisition of dignity, will broaden his spiritual faculties and rise towards God.

Only in this way will the human being, strengthened by a religious impulse that is perennially valid, fulfil himself completely as an individual and contribute, in a way really in keeping with his dignity, to the good of the society in which he lives his daily life.

It is clear, furthermore, that when the Church and we ourselves reaffirm adherence to those principles which spring from a sound conception of human and Christian anthropology, we do not do so without laying foundations for overcoming selfish individualism, sterilizing lack of solidarity and those attitudes which prevent the citizen from dedicating himself effectively to the common good, feeling himself a responsible and free member of society. For it is only in this rightful atmosphere of responsible freedom that man acquires his complete dimension, since authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 17).

This converging effort, human and Christian, is the one that must lead, as we hope and wish, to a strengthening of private and public moral sense in Venezuela; to urgent assistance for those most in need, to a consolidation and union of the family, the keystone of a stable society, to a general system in which justice and solidarity are at the basis of the whole of civic life.

Mr President, accept now the expression of our sincere satisfaction and gratitude for your visit, which we hope will yield permanent fruit for society and the Church in your country, while we invoke for you, for the Venezuelan authorities and people, the light and assistance of the Almighty.

*ORa n.49 p.3.