



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO MEXICO AND THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA

(MARCH 23-29, 2012)

WELCOMING CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Guanajuato International Airport, Silao

Friday, 23 March 2012

[Video](#)

*Mister President,
Your Eminences,
Dear Brother Bishops and Priests,
Distinguished Civil Authorities,
Beloved People of Guanajuato and of Mexico,*

I am very happy to be here, and I give thanks to God for allowing me to realize the desire, kept in my heart for a long time, to confirm in the faith the People of God of this great nation in their own land. The affection of the Mexican people for the Successor of Peter, whom they always remember in their prayers, is well known. I say this here, considered to be the geographical centre of your land, which my venerable predecessor, Blessed John Paul II, wanted to visit during his first Apostolic Journey. Although he was not able to come, on that occasion he left a message of encouragement while flying over its airspace. I am happy to repeat his words here on land among you: “I am grateful”, he said in the message, “to the faithful of El Bajío and Guanajuato for your affection towards the Pope and your faithfulness to the Lord. May God be with you always” (cf. Telegram, 30 January 1979).

With this in mind, I offer my thanks to you, Mister President, for your warm welcome and I

respectfully greet your wife and the rest of the civil authorities who have honoured me by their presence. I offer a special greeting to the Most Reverend José Guadalupe Martín Rábago, Archbishop of León, and to the Most Reverend Carlos Aguiar Retes, Archbishop of Tlalnepantla and President of the Mexican Episcopal Conference and the Latin America Episcopal Council. With this brief visit, I wish to greet all Mexicans and to include all the nations and peoples of Latin America, represented here by many Bishops. Our meeting in this place, where the majestic monument to Christ the King on Mount Cubilete, gives testimony to the deep roots of the Catholic faith among the Mexican people, who receive his constant blessings in all their vicissitudes.

Mexico, and the majority of Latin American nations, have been commemorating in recent years the bicentennial of their independence. There have been many religious celebrations in thanksgiving to God for this important and significant moment. During these celebrations, as in the Mass in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Most Holy Mary was invoked fervently, she who gently showed how the Lord loves all people and gave himself for them without distinction. Our Heavenly Mother has kept vigil over the faith of her children in the formation of these nations and she continues to do so today as new challenges present themselves.

I come as a pilgrim of faith, of hope, and of love. I wish to confirm those who believe in Christ in their faith, by strengthening and encouraging them to revitalize their faith by listening to the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments and living coherently. In this way, they will be able to share their faith with others as missionaries to their brothers and sisters and to act as a leaven in society, contributing to a respectful and peaceful coexistence based on the incomparable dignity of every human being, created by God, which no one has the right to forget or disregard. This dignity is expressed especially in the fundamental right to freedom of religion, in its full meaning and integrity.

As a pilgrim of hope, I speak to them in the words of Saint Paul: "But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope" (*1 Th.* 4:13). Confidence in God offers the certainty of meeting him, of receiving his grace; the believer's hope is based on this. And, aware of this, we strive to transform the present structures and events which are less than satisfactory and seem immovable or insurmountable, while also helping those who do not see meaning or a future in life. Yes, hope changes the practical existence of each man and woman in a real way (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 2). Hope points to "a new heaven and a new earth" (*Rev.* 21:1), that is already making visible some of its reflections. Moreover, when it takes root in a people, when it is shared, it shines as light that dispels the darkness which blinds and takes hold of us. This country and the entire continent are called to live their hope in God as a profound conviction, transforming it into an attitude of the heart and a practical commitment to walk together in the building of a better world. As I said in Rome, "continue progressing untiringly in the building of a society founded upon the development of the good, the triumph of love and the spread of justice" (*Homily, 12 December 2011*).

Together with faith and hope, the believer in Christ – indeed the whole Church – lives and practises charity as an essential element of mission. In its primary meaning, charity “is first of all the simple response to immediate needs and specific situations” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 31), as we help those who suffer from hunger, lack shelter, or are in need in some way in their life. Nobody is excluded on account of their origin or belief from this mission of the Church, which does not compete with other private or public initiatives. In fact, the Church willingly works with those who pursue the same ends. Nor does she have any aim other than doing good in an unselfish and respectful way to those in need, who often lack signs of authentic love.

Mister President, my dear friends: in these days I will pray to the Lord and to Our Lady of Guadalupe for all of you so that you may be true to the faith which you have received and to its best traditions. I will pray especially for those in need, particularly for those who suffer because of old and new rivalries, resentments and all forms of violence. I know that I am in a country which is proud of its hospitality and wishes no one to feel unwelcome. I already knew this, and now I can see it and feel it in my heart. I sincerely hope that many Mexicans who live far from their homeland will feel the same way and that nothing will cause them to forget it or to lose the wish to see its growth in harmony and in authentic integral development. Thank you!