



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO CUBA (JANUARY 21-26, 1998)

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

José Martí Plaza (Havana)

Sunday, 25 January 1998

1. *"This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep"* (Neh 8:9). With great joy I celebrate Holy Mass in this José Martí Plaza on *Sunday, the Lord's Day*, which should be dedicated to rest, prayer and family life. The word of God calls us together to grow in faith and to celebrate the *presence of the risen Lord in our midst*, for *"by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body"* (1 Cor 12:13), the Mystical Body of Christ which is the Church. Jesus Christ unites all the baptized. From him flows the fraternal love among Cuban Catholics and Catholics everywhere, since all are *"the body of Christ and individually members of it"* (1 Cor 12:27). The Church in Cuba is not alone or isolated; rather, it is part of the Universal Church which extends throughout the whole world.

2. With affection I greet Cardinal Jaime Ortega, the Pastor of this Archdiocese, and I thank him for his kind words at the beginning of this celebration, telling me of the joys and the hopes which mark the life of this ecclesial community. I likewise greet the Cardinals present from different countries, my Brother Bishops in Cuba, and the Bishops from other places who have wished to take part in this solemn celebration. I cordially greet the priests, the men and women religious and all the faithful assembled here in such numbers. I assure each one of you of my affection and closeness in the Lord. I respectfully greet President Fidel Castro Ruz, who has wished to take part in this Mass.

I also thank the civil authorities who have wished to be present today and I am grateful for the co-operation which they have provided.

3. *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor"* (Lk 4:18). Every minister of God has to make his own these words spoken by Jesus in Nazareth. And so, as I come among you, I wish to bring you the Good News of hope in God. As a servant of the Gospel I bring you this *message of love and solidarity* which Jesus Christ, by his coming, offers to men and women in every age. In absolutely no way is this an ideology or a new economic or political system; rather, it is a *path of authentic peace, justice and freedom*.

4. The ideological and economic systems succeeding one another in the last two centuries have often encouraged conflict as a method, since their programmes contained the seeds of opposition and disunity. This fact profoundly affected their understanding of man and of his relations with others. Some of these systems also presumed to relegate religion to the merely private sphere, stripping it of any social influence or importance. In this regard, it is helpful to recall that *a modern State cannot make atheism or religion one of its political ordinances*. The State, while distancing itself from all extremes of fanaticism or secularism, should encourage a harmonious social climate and a suitable legislation which enables every person and every religious confession to live their faith freely, to express that faith in the context of public life and to count on adequate resources and opportunities to bring its spiritual, moral and civic benefits to bear on the life of the nation.

On the other hand, various places are witnessing the resurgence of a certain *capitalist neoliberalism* which subordinates the human person to *blind market forces* and conditions the development of peoples on those forces. From its centres of power, such neoliberalism often places unbearable burdens upon less favored countries. Hence, at times, *unsustainable economic programmes* are imposed on nations as a condition for further assistance. In the international community, we thus see *a small number of countries growing exceedingly rich at the cost of the increasing impoverishment of a great number of other countries*; as a result the wealthy grow ever wealthier, while the poor grow ever poorer.

5. Dear brothers and sisters: *the Church is a teacher in humanity*. Faced with these systems, she presents *a culture of love and of life*, restoring hope to humanity, hope in the transforming power of love lived in the unity willed by Christ. For this to happen, it is necessary to follow *a path of reconciliation, dialogue and fraternal acceptance* of one's neighbour, of every human person. This can be called the social Gospel of the Church.

The Church, in carrying out her mission, *sets before the world a new justice*, the justice of the kingdom of God (cf. Mt 6:33). On various occasions I have spoken on social themes. It is necessary to keep speaking on these themes, as long as any injustice, however small, is present in the world; otherwise the Church would not be faithful to the mission entrusted to her by Christ. *At stake here is man*, the concrete human person. While times and situations may change, there are always people who need the voice of the Church so that their difficulties, their suffering and their distress may be known. Those who find themselves in these situations can be certain that they will not be betrayed, for the Church is with them and the Pope, in his heart and with his words

of encouragement, embraces all who suffer injustice.

After a long burst of applause, the Holy Father said:

I am not against applause because when you applaud the Pope can take a little rest!

On the threshold of the Year 2000, the teachings of Jesus maintain their full force. They are valid for all of you, dear brothers and sisters. In seeking the justice of the kingdom we cannot hesitate in the face of difficulties and misunderstandings. If the Master's call to justice, to service and to love is accepted as good news, then the heart is expanded, criteria are transformed and a culture of love and life is born. This is the great change which society needs and expects; and it can only come about if there is first a conversion of each individual heart, as a condition for the necessary changes in the structures of society.

6. *"The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to proclaim release to the captives ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed"* (Lk 4:18). The Good News of Jesus must be accompanied by a proclamation of freedom based on the solid foundation of truth: *"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free"* (Jn 8:31-32). The truth of which Jesus speaks is not only the intellectual grasp of reality, but also *the truth about man* and his transcendent condition, *his rights and duties, his greatness and his limitations*. It is the same truth which Jesus proclaimed with his life, reaffirmed before Pilate and, by his silence, before Herod; it is the same truth that led him to his saving Cross and his glorious Resurrection.

A freedom which is not based on truth conditions man in such a way that he sometimes becomes the object and not the subject of his social, cultural, economic and political surroundings; this leaves him almost no initiative for his personal development. At other times that freedom takes on an individualistic cast and, with no regard for the freedom of others, imprisons man in his own egoism. *The attainment of freedom in responsibility is a duty which no one can shirk*. For Christians, *the freedom of the children of God* is not only a gift and a task, but its attainment also involves an invaluable witness and a genuine contribution to the journey towards the liberation of the whole human race. *This liberation cannot be reduced to its social and political aspects, but rather reaches its fullness in the exercise of freedom of conscience, the basis and foundation of all other human rights*.

To the crowds who were shouting: "The Pope is free and wants us all to be free", the Holy Father replied:

Yes, he lives with that freedom for which Christ has set you free.

For many of the political and economic systems operative today the greatest challenge is still that of *combining freedom and social justice, freedom and solidarity*, so that no one is relegated to a

position of inferiority. *The Church's social doctrine* is meant to be a reflection and a contribution which can shed light on and reconcile the relationship between the inalienable rights of each individual and the needs of society, so that people can attain their profound aspirations and integral fulfilment in accordance with their condition as sons and daughters of God and citizens in society. Hence *the Catholic laity* should contribute to this fulfilment by the *application of the Church's social teachings in every sector open to people of goodwill*.

7. In the Gospel proclaimed today, justice is seen as intimately linked to truth. This is also evident in the *enlightened thinking of the Fathers of your country*. The Servant of God *Fr Félix Varela*, inspired by his Christian faith and his fidelity to the priestly ministry, sowed in the heart of the Cuban people the *seeds of justice and freedom* which he dreamed of seeing blossom in an independent Cuba.

The teaching of José Martí on love between all people had profoundly evangelical roots, and thus overcame the false conflict between faith in God and love and service to one's country. This great leader wrote: "Pure, selfless, persecuted, tormented, poetic and simple, the religion of the Nazarene enthralled all honourable men.... *Every people needs to be religious*. Not only as part of its essence, but for its own practical benefit it needs to be religious.... An irreligious people will die, because nothing in it encourages virtue. Human injustices offend virtue; it is necessary that heavenly justice guarantee it".

As everyone knows, *Cuba has a Christian soul* and this has brought her *a universal vocation*. Called to overcome isolation, she needs to open herself to the world and the world needs to draw close to Cuba, her people, her sons and daughters who are surely her greatest wealth. *This is the time to start out on the new paths* called for by the times of renewal which we are experiencing at the approach of the third millennium of the Christian era!

8. Dear brothers and sisters: *God has blessed this people with true educators of the national conscience*, clear and firm models of the Christian faith as the most effective support of virtue and love. Today the Bishops, with the priests, men and women religious and lay faithful, are striving to build bridges in order to bring minds and hearts closer together; they are fostering and strengthening peace, and *preparing the civilization of love and justice*. I am present among you as a *messenger of truth and hope*. For this reason I wish to repeat my appeal: *let Jesus Christ enlighten you; accept without reservation the splendour of his truth*, so that all can *set out on the path of unity through love and solidarity*, while avoiding exclusion, isolation and conflict, which are contrary to the will of God who is Love.

May the Holy Spirit enlighten by his gifts those who, in different ways, are responsible for the future of this people so close to my heart. And may Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre, Queen of Cuba, obtain for her children the gifts of peace, progress and happiness.

At the end of his homily the Holy Father spoke extemporaneously:

This wind today is very significant because wind symbolizes the Holy Spirit. "Spiritus spirat ubi vult; Spiritus vult spirare in Cuba". My last words are in Latin, because Cuba also has a Latin tradition: Latin America, Latin Cuba, Latin language! "Spiritus spirat ubi vult et vult Cubam"! Goodbye.