



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,
MEXICO AND THE BAHAMAS

MEETING WITH MEXICAN INDIOS

Cuilapan, Mexico

Monday, 29 January 1979

Beloved Brothers, Indios and Peasants,

I greet you with joy and I am grateful for your enthusiastic presence and the words of welcome you have addressed to me. I cannot find a better greeting to express to you the sentiments that now fill my heart than the sentence of St Peter, first Pope of the Church: "Peace to all of you that are in Christ". Peace to you, who form such a large group.

You, too, inhabitants of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Culiacán and those who have come from so many other parts, heirs to the blood and the culture of your noble ancestors—particularly the Mixtecs and the Zapotecs—were "called to be saints together with all those who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor 1:2).

The Son of God "dwelt among us" to make sons of God those who believe in his name (cf. Jn 1:11 ff.); and he entrusted to the Church the continuation of this mission of salvation wherever there are men. So it is not surprising that one day, in the already distant sixteenth century, intrepid missionaries arrived here out of faithfulness to the Church, eager to assimilate your lifestyle and customs in order to reveal better, and give a living expression to the image of Christ. Let our grateful memory go to the first Bishop of Oaxaca, Juan José López de Zára—to and the many other missionaries—Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and Jesuits—men whose faith and human generosity are worthy of admiration.

They were well aware how important culture is as a vehicle to transmit the faith, in order that men may progress in knowledge of God. In this there can be no distinction of race or of culture, "there cannot be Greek and Jew, ...slave, freeman, but Christ is all, and in all" (cf. Col 3:9-11). This is a challenge and a stimulus for the Church, since, being faithful to the genuine and complete message of the Lord, she must open up and interpret the whole human reality in order to instil the strength of the Gospel into it (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20, 40).

Beloved Brothers, my presence among you wishes to be a living and authentic sign of this universal concern of the Church. The Pope and the Church are with you and love you: they love your persons, your culture, your traditions; they admire your marvellous past, they encourage you in the present and they hope so much for the future.

But it is not just of this that I want to speak to you. Through you, Indios and peasants, there appears before me the immense multitude of the rural world, which is still the prevalent part in the Latin-American continent and a very large sector, even nowadays, in our planet.

Before this imposing spectacle reflected in my eyes, I cannot but think of the identical picture that my predecessor Paul VI contemplated, ten years ago, in his memorable visit to Colombia and, more concretely, in his meeting with the peasants.

I want to repeat with him—if it were possible in an even stronger tone of voice—that the present Pope wishes "to be in solidarity with your cause, which is the cause of humble people, of the poor" (Paul VI, *Address to Peasants*, 23 August 1968). The Pope is with these masses of the population that are "nearly always abandoned at an ignoble level of life and sometimes harshly treated and exploited" (*ibidem*).

Adopting the line of my predecessors John XXIII and Paul VI, as well as that of the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Mater et Magistra*; *Populorum Progressio*; *Gaudium et Spes*, 9, 71 etc.), and in view of a situation that continues to be alarming, not often better and sometimes even worse, the Pope wishes to be your voice, the voice of those who cannot speak or who are silenced, in order to be the conscience of consciences, an invitation to action, in order to make up for lost time which is often time of prolonged suffering and unsatisfied hopes.

The depressed rural world, the worker who with his sweat waters also his affliction, cannot wait any longer for full and effective recognition of his dignity, which is not inferior to that of any other social sector. He has the right to be respected and not to be deprived, with manoeuvres which are sometimes tantamount to real spoliation, of the little that he has. He has the right to be rid of the barriers of exploitation, often made up of intolerable selfishness, against which his best efforts of advancement are shattered. He has the right to real help—which is not charity or crumbs of justice—in order that he may have access to the development that his dignity as a man and as a son of God deserves.

Therefore it is necessary to act promptly and in depth. It is necessary to carry out bold changes, which are deeply innovatory. It is necessary to undertake urgent reforms without waiting any longer (*Populorum Progressio*, 32).

It cannot be forgotten that the measures to be taken must be adequate. The Church does indeed defend the legitimate right to private property, but she also teaches no less clearly that there is always a social mortgage on all private property, in order that goods may serve the general purpose that God gave them. And if the common good requires it, there should be no hesitation even at expropriation, carried out in the due form (*Populorum Progressio*, 24).

The agricultural world has great importance and great dignity. It is just this world that offers society the products necessary for its nutrition. It is a task that deserves the appreciation and grateful esteem of which is a recognition of the dignity of those engaged in it.

A dignity that can and must increase with the contemplation of God, contemplation encouraged by contact with nature, reflection of the divine action which looks after the grass in the fields, makes it grow, nourishes it; which makes the land fertile, sending it rain and wind, so that it may feed also animals, which help man, as we read at the beginning of Genesis.

Work in the fields involves great difficulties because of the effort it demands, the contempt with which it is sometimes considered and the obstacles it meets with; difficulties which only a far-reaching action can solve. Otherwise, the flight from the countryside to the cities will continue, frequently creating problems of extensive and distressing proletarianization, overcrowding in houses unworthy of human peoples, and so on.

An evil that is quite widespread is the tendency to individualism among rural workers, whereas a better co-ordinated and united action could be of great help. Think of this too, dear sons.

In spite of all this, the rural world possesses enviable human and religious riches: a deep-rooted love of the family; the sense of friendship; help for the needy; deep humanism; love of peace and civil society; a deep religious sense; trust and opening to God; promotion of love for the Blessed Virgin; and so many others. It is a well-deserved tribute of recognition that the Pope wishes to express to you, and for which society is indebted to you. Thank you, rural workers, for your precious contribution to social good; mankind owes you a great deal.

On your side, leaders of the peoples, powerful classes which sometimes keep unproductive lands that hide the bread that so many families lack, human conscience, the conscience of peoples, the cry of the destitute, and above all the voice of God, the voice of the Church, repeat to you with me: It is not just, it is not human, it is not Christian to continue with certain situations that are clearly unjust. It is necessary to carry out real, effective measures—at the local, national, and international level—along the broad line marked by the encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (part three). It

is clear that those who must collaborate most in this, are those who can do most.

Beloved Brothers and Sons, work at your human elevation, but do not stop here. Make yourselves more and more worthy in the moral and religious field. Do not harbour feelings of hatred and violence, but look towards the Master and Lord of all, who gives each one the reward that his acts deserve. The Church is with you and encourages you to live your condition as sons of God, united with Christ, under the gaze of Mary, our Holy Mother.

The Pope asks you for your prayer and offers you his. And blessing all of you and your families, he takes leave of you with the words of the Apostle St Paul: "Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss". Let this be a call to hope, Amen.

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