



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC VOYAGE

OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA WELCOME CEREMONY **ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II**

International Airport of Banja Luka

Sunday, 22 June 2003

*Illustrious Members of the Presidency of Bosnia Hercegovina,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Distinguished Authorities,
Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

1. With gratitude for your invitation, I have returned after six years to Bosnia-Hercegovina. I give thanks to God for allowing me once again to meet peoples who have always been so close to my heart.

I thank the Honourable *Members of the Presidency of Bosnia-Hercegovina*, for their cordial greeting and for all that they, together with the other Authorities, have done to make my visit possible.

I greet my dear brother, *the Most Reverend Franjo Komarica*, the Bishop of Banja Luka, together with *the other Bishops* and all the faithful of the Catholic Church. I greet our brothers and sisters of *the Serbian Orthodox Church* and of the *other Ecclesial Communities*, and the followers of *Islam* and *Judaism*.

2. Knowing that I am entering your homes through radio and television, I greet and embrace all of you, *dear people living in the different parts of Bosnia-Hercegovina*. I know the long ordeal which you have endured, the burden of suffering which is daily a part of your lives, the temptations to discouragement and resignation which you experience. I stand beside you in asking *the international community*, which already has done so much, to continue to be close to you and to help you to reach quickly a situation of full security in justice and harmony.

You yourselves must be the primary builders of your future! The tenacity of your character and the rich human, cultural and religious traditions which distinguish you are your true wealth. Do not give up! Certainly *starting afresh is not easy*. It requires sacrifice and steadfastness; it requires knowing how to sow seeds and then to wait patiently. But you know that *starting afresh is nevertheless possible*. Trust in God's help, and trust too in human initiative.

3. If society is to take on a truly human face and everyone is to look to the future with confidence, it is necessary to *rebuild man from within*, healing wounds and achieving a genuine purification of memory through mutual forgiveness. The root of every good and, sadly, of every evil is *in the depths of the heart* (cf. Mk 7:21-23). It is there that change must occur, making it possible to *renew the fabric of society* and to establish human relationships which favour cooperation between the vital forces present in the country.

In this regard, a grave responsibility belongs to those who, by the will of the electorate, *democratically govern the nation*: may they not renounce this indispensable task because of present difficulties, nor should they let themselves be pressured by partisan interests.

The Catholic Church seeks to make her own contribution to this common undertaking through the practical involvement of her sons and daughters, particularly through her various initiatives in the areas of education, aid and human development, in the free exercise of her specific mission.

4. Shortly, during the celebration of Holy Mass, I will have the joy of enrolling among the Blessed *the young Ivan Merz*, born here in Banja Luka, an illustrious example of Christian life and apostolic commitment.

By his prayers may he confirm the hopes and good wishes which the Pope today expresses for Bosnia-Herzegovina, so that present problems will find a positive solution, and that the country will see realized its aspiration to become part of united Europe in a context of prosperity, freedom and peace.