



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE PILGRIMS FROM CROATIA

Saturday, 8 November 2003

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I gladly extend my heartfelt greeting to each of you who have come to Rome to manifest once again your deep devotion to the See of Peter and, at the same time, to exchange the Pastoral Visit that I had the joy of making to your Country last June. My warm welcome to all.

I greet first of all *Cardinal Josip Bozanic* and I thank him for the kind words which, also as President of the Bishops' Conference of Croatia, he has addressed to me in the name of those present. Together with him, I extend brotherly greetings to the Bishops who have wished to be present at this meeting. My respectful thought then goes to the representatives of the civil and military Authorities of Croatia, whom I thank for ensuring the success of my Pastoral Visits.

I would like to renew the expression of my deep gratitude for the warm welcome that always awaits me each time that I step onto the soil of your beloved Country. I keep in my mind and heart the images of an enthusiastic, hospitable and generous people animated by a living faith.

2. I recall the first large meeting with the Croatian people in the nearby Basilica, on 30 April 1979, at the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles. Since then I have had the opportunity to meet your countrymen on different occasions: here in Rome and on the Pastoral Visits to your homeland.

Providence decreed that my 100th Apostolic Visit outside of Italy would actually be to Croatia, with stops in ancient and splendid Dubrovnik for the Beatification of Sr Maria of Jesus Crucified Petkovic, and then in Osijek and Djakovo, Rijeka and Zadar. As a Gospel pilgrim, then, on the world's highways, called to serve the Church on the Chair of Peter, I was able to confirm you in the faith to which you have given a beautiful witness in the midst of ongoing adversity and suffering. In

this way I wanted to sustain your much-tried hope and to awaken your charity, urging you to persevere in your attachment to the Church in the new atmosphere of freedom and democracy re-established 13 years ago.

3. Your beloved Nation has the necessary vigour and capacity to address the present-day challenges appropriately. I hope that this will stand you in good stead in building a solid society, ready to give effective support to the weakest classes; a society founded on the religious and human values that down the centuries have inspired the generations before you; a society that respects the sacredness of life and God's great plan for the family; a society that keeps healthy forces united, encouraging the spirit of communion and co-responsibility.

The commitment to men and women for their true good also draws strength from the Gospel and is therefore part of the Church's mission (cf. Mt 25: 34-46; Lk 4: 18-19); whatever is genuinely human cannot be foreign to Christ's disciples.

4. I pray that God will grant peace, harmony and perseverance to the noble nation of Croatia, in its commitment towards the common good. I entrust your people to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of the Great Croatian Baptismal Vow, and to St Joseph, heavenly Patron of your country.

To all here present, to your diocesan and parochial communities, to your families, I impart my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.

Praised be Jesus and Mary!