



## The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO H.E. Mrs MARÍA JESÚS FIGA LÓPEZ-PALOP  
NEW AMBASSADOR OF SPAIN TO THE HOLY SEE**  
*Saturday, 16 April 2011*

*Madam Ambassador,*

In receiving the Letters of Credence which accredit you, Your Excellency, as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Spain to the Holy See, I cordially thank you for the words you have wished to address to me, as well as for the respectful greeting conveyed to me by Their Majesties the King and Queen, the Government and the Spanish people. I reciprocate with pleasure, expressing my best wishes for peace, prosperity and spiritual wellbeing for all, whom I keep very present in my memory and in prayer. I welcome you at the beginning of your important work in this Diplomatic Mission, which depends on centuries of brilliant history and on so many of your distinguished predecessors.

I recently visited Santiago de Compostela and Barcelona and I remember with gratitude the great care and the many expressions of closeness and affection shown by the Spanish people and their Authorities to the Successor of Peter. In these two symbolic places the spiritual attraction of the Apostle St James stands out, together with the presence of wonderful signs that invite one to look on high, even in the midst of a multifaceted and complex environment.

During my visit I saw many demonstrations of the liveliness of the Catholic faith in these lands which have seen the birth of so many saints and are scattered with cathedrals, centres for assistance and for culture, inspired by the deeply-rooted, fertile attachment and fidelity of the inhabitants to their religious beliefs. This also entails the responsibility for diplomatic relations between Spain and the Holy See. These relations must always seek to encourage, with mutual respect and collaboration within the legitimate autonomy in their respective fields, all that can procure the good of people and the authentic development of their rights and freedoms, which include the expression of their faith and their conscience, in both the public and private spheres.

Because of your important background in diplomatic service, Your Excellency, you know well that in her diplomatic activity the Church seeks the integral good of each nation and its citizens in carrying out her mission. She operates in the context of her competence and fully respects the autonomy of the civil authorities whom she appreciates and she asks God that they may exercise their service to society with generosity, honesty, success and justice.

Moreover this setting — in which the mission of the Church and the role of the State converge — has been forged in the bilateral agreements between Spain and the Holy See on the principal aspects of common interest. These agreements provide the necessary juridical support and stability for their respective action and initiatives to benefit all.

You are beginning your lofty responsibility, Madam Ambassador, in a situation of great global financial difficulty, which is also besetting Spain with truly disturbing results, especially in the area of unemployment. This gives rise to discouragement and frustration, especially among young people and the less privileged families. I keep all citizens present in my mind and I ask the Almighty to enlighten all who have public responsibilities so that they may bravely seek the path to a recovery that benefits the whole of society. In this regard, I would like to point out with pleasure the praiseworthy work of the Catholic institutions which provide prompt aid to the neediest, while I ask all for an increasing readiness in this commitment to solidarity.

By her work the Church demonstrates an essential characteristic of her being which is at the same time her most visible feature and is appreciated by many, believers and nonbelievers alike. However, she strives to go beyond mere external and material aid and aims for the heart of Christian charity, in which the neighbour is first and foremost a person, a child of God who is always in need of brotherhood, respect and acceptance, whatever his or her situation.

In addition, the Church offers something which is connatural to her and which benefits people and nations: she offers Christ, the hope that encourages and fortifies, as an antidote to the disappointment of other transient proposals and to hearts that lack values, that end by becoming so hard that they are no longer able to perceive the real meaning of life and the reason for things. This hope gives life to trust and collaboration, thereby changing the sombre present into strength of mind to face the future of both the person and of the family and society with hope.

Nevertheless, as I recalled in my *Message for the World Day of Peace 2011*, instead of living and organizing society in such a way that encourages an openness to transcendence (cf. n. 9), forms of hostility to the faith — often sophisticated — abound and “find expression in a denial of history and the rejection of religious symbols which reflect the identity and the culture of the majority of citizens” (n. 13).

The fact that in certain milieus there is a tendency to consider religion as a socially insignificant and even disturbing factor does not justify the attempt to marginalize it, sometimes through

denigration, derision, discrimination and indifference to episodes of evident profanation. Since in this way the fundamental right to religious freedom inherent in the dignity of the human person is violated, which is “an authentic weapon of peace... which can change the world and make it better” (cf. n. 15).

In her concern for all human beings, in all their dimensions, the Church keeps watch over their fundamental rights in frank dialogue with all who help to make them effective and not to restrict them. She watches over the right to human life from its beginning to its natural end, because life is sacred and no one may arbitrarily dispose of it. She supervises protection and aid to the family, and supports financial, social and juridical measures, so that the man and woman who contract marriage and form a family may have the necessary support to fulfil their mission of being a shrine of love and life.

The Church also supports an education that integrates moral and religious values, in accordance with the beliefs of the parents, as is their right and as befits the integral development of young people; and for the same reason, the teaching of Catholicism at all the centres they may choose, as sanctioned in the proper juridical order.

Before concluding, I would like to mention my next visit to Spain this August to take part in the [26th World Youth Day in Madrid](#). I joyfully unite in the efforts and prayers of its organizers, who are carefully preparing this most important event, in the hope that it will yield abundant spiritual fruits for youth and for Spain.

I also note the willingness, cooperation and generous help that the Government of the Nation, as well as the autonomous and local Authorities, are expending for the greatest possible success of a project that will attract the whole world’s attention and will once again demonstrate the great heart and spirit of the Spanish people.

Madam Ambassador, I offer you my best wishes for the lofty mission that has been entrusted to you, in order that relations between Spain and the Holy See may be reinforced and progress. At the same time I assure you of the Pope’s deep appreciation of the ever beloved people of Spain.

I ask you kindly to express my sentiments to the King and Queen of Spain and to the other authorities of the nation, as I invoke an abundance of divine Blessings from the Most High upon you, Your Excellency, upon your family which has accompanied you today, as well as on your collaborators and the noble Spanish nation.

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