



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO MEXICO AND THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA

(MARCH 23-29, 2012)

WELCOMING CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Antonio Maceo International Airport, Santiago de Cuba

Monday, 26 March 2012

[Video]

*Mr President,
Dear Cardinals and Brother Bishops,
Distinguished Authorities,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear People of Cuba,*

Thank you, Mr President, for your welcome and your kind words, with which you also conveyed the sentiments of respect of the Cuban government and people for the Successor of Peter. I greet the civil authorities here present, as well as the members of the diplomatic corps. I cordially greet the President of the Episcopal Conference, Archbishop Dionisio Guillermo García Ibáñez of Santiago de Cuba; the Archbishop of Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega y Alamino, and my other Brother Bishops of Cuba, and I assure them of my deep spiritual closeness. Finally, I greet with heartfelt affection all the faithful of the Catholic Church in Cuba, the beloved people of this beautiful island, and all Cubans wherever they may be. You are always present in my heart and prayers, especially in the days preceding the much anticipated moment of my visit to you, which the grace and goodness of God has made possible.

Standing here among you, I cannot but recall the historic [visit to Cuba](#) of my predecessor, Blessed John Paul II, who left an indelible mark on the soul of all Cubans. For many, whether believers or not, his example and his teachings are a luminous guide for their personal lives and their public activity in the service of the common good of the nation. His visit to this island was like a gentle breath of fresh air which gave new strength to the Church in Cuba, awakening in many a renewed awareness of the importance of faith and inspiring them to open their hearts to Christ, while at the same time kindling their hope and encouraging their desire to work fearlessly for a better future. One of the important fruits of that visit was the inauguration of a new phase in the relationship in Cuba between Church and State, in a new spirit of cooperation and trust, even if many areas remain in which greater progress can and ought to be made, especially as regards the indispensable public contribution that religion is called to make in the life of society.

I am pleased to share your joy as you celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the holy statue of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre. Since the beginning she has been very much present in the personal lives of Cubans as well as in the great events of the nation, especially since independence, for she is honoured by all as the true mother of the Cuban people. Devotion to the *Virgen Mambisa* has sustained the faith and inspired the defence and promotion of all that gives dignity to the human condition and its fundamental rights, and continues to do so today with ever greater strength, giving visible witness to the fruitfulness of the preaching of the Gospel in these lands, and to the profound Christian roots which shape the deepest identity of the Cuban soul. Following in the footsteps of countless pilgrims down the centuries, I too wish to go to El Cobre to kneel at the feet of the Mother of God, to thank her for her concern for all her Cuban children, and to ask her to guide the future of this beloved nation in the ways of justice, peace, freedom and reconciliation.

I come to Cuba as a pilgrim of charity, to confirm my brothers and sisters in the faith and strengthen them in the hope which is born of the presence of God's love in our lives. I carry in my heart the just aspirations and legitimate desires of all Cubans, wherever they may be, their sufferings and their joys, their concerns and their noblest desires, those of the young and the elderly, of adolescents and children, of the sick and workers, of prisoners and their families, and of the poor and those in need.

Many parts of the world today are experiencing a time of particular economic difficulty, that not a few people regard as part of a profound spiritual and moral crisis which has left humanity devoid of values and defenceless before the ambition and selfishness of certain powers which take little account of the true good of individuals and families. We can no longer continue in the same cultural and moral direction which has caused the painful situation that many suffer. On the other hand, real progress calls for an ethics which focuses on the human person and takes account of the most profound human needs, especially man's spiritual and religious dimension. In the hearts and minds of many, the way is thus opening to an ever greater certainty that the rebirth of society demands upright men and women of firm moral convictions, with noble and strong values who will

not be manipulated by dubious interests and who are respectful of the unchanging and transcendent nature of the human person.

Dear friends, I am convinced that Cuba, at this moment of particular importance in its history, is already looking to the future, and thus is striving to renew and broaden its horizons. Of great help in this enterprise will be the fine patrimony of spiritual and moral values which fashioned the nation's true identity, and which stand out in the work and the life of many distinguished fathers of the country, like Blessed José Olallo y Valdés, the Servant of God Félix Varela, and the acclaimed José Martí. For her part, the Church too has diligently contributed to the cultivation of those values through her generous and selfless pastoral mission, and renews her commitment to work tirelessly the better to serve all Cubans.

I ask the Lord to bless abundantly this land and its children, in particular those who feel disadvantaged, the excluded and all those who suffer in body or spirit. At the same time, I pray that, through the intercession of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre, he will grant to all a future of hope, solidarity and harmony. Thank you.