



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO MEXICO AND TO THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA

(MARCH 23-29, 2012)

DEPARTURE CEREMONY

WORDS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Havana, José Martí International Airport

Wednesday, 28 March 2012

[Video]

*Mr President,
Your Eminences, my Brother Bishops,
Distinguished Authorities,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,*

I thank God for allowing me to visit this beautiful Isle which left so deep a mark on the heart of my beloved predecessor, Blessed John Paul II, when he came to these lands as a herald of truth and hope. I too greatly have wished to come among you as a pilgrim of charity, in order to thank the Virgin Mary for the presence of her venerable statue of the Sanctuary of El Cobre, whence for four centuries she has accompanied the journey of the Church in this nation and given encouragement to all Cubans so that, from the hand of Christ, they might discover the true meaning of the desires and aspirations found in the human heart and gain the strength needed to build a fraternal society in which no one feels excluded. “Christ, risen from the dead, shines in this world, and he does so most brightly in those places where, in human terms, everything is somber and hopeless. He has conquered death – he is alive – and faith in him, like a small light, cuts through all that is dark and threatening” (*Prayer Vigil with Young People, Freiburg, 24 September 2011*).

I thank the President and the other national authorities for the interest and generous cooperation which they have shown in the the preparation of this Journey. I am also deeply grateful to the

members of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Cuba, who spared no effort or sacrifice in this regard, and to all those who have helped in various ways, especially by their prayers.

I hold deep in my heart all the Cuban people, each and every one. You have surrounded me with prayer and affection, offered me cordial hospitality and shared with me your profound and rightful aspirations.

I came here as a witness to Jesus Christ, convinced that, wherever he is present, discouragement yields to hope, goodness dispels uncertainties and a powerful force opens up the horizon to beneficial and unexpected possibilities. In Christ's name, and as the Successor of the Apostle Peter, I wished to proclaim his message of salvation and to strengthen the zeal and pastoral concern of the Cuban Bishops, the priests, the religious and all those preparing with enthusiasm for priestly ministry and the consecrated life. May this Journey also serve as a new impulse to all those who cooperate with perseverance and self-sacrifice in the work of evangelization, particularly the lay faithful. By intensifying their commitment to God at home and in the workplace, may they never tire of offering their responsible contribution for the good and the integral progress of their homeland.

The path which Christ points out to humanity, and to each particular individual and people, is not a source of constraint, but rather the primary and principal premise for their authentic development. The light of the Lord, has shone brightly during these days; may that light never fade in those who have welcomed it; may it help all people to foster social harmony and to allow the blossoming of all that is finest in the Cuban soul, its most noble values, which can be the basis for building a society of broad vision, renewed and reconciled. May no one feel excluded from taking up this exciting task because of limitations of his or her basic freedoms, or excused by indolence or lack of material resources, a situation which is worsened when restrictive economic measures, imposed from outside the country, unfairly burden its people.

I now conclude my pilgrimage, but I will continue praying fervently that you will go forward and that Cuba will be the home of all and for all Cubans, where justice and freedom coexist in a climate of serene fraternity. Respect and promotion of freedom which is present in the heart of each person are essential in order to respond adequately to the fundamental demands of his or her dignity and, in this way, to build up a society in which all are indispensable actors in the future of their life, their family and their country.

The present hour urgently demands that in personal, national and international co-existence we reject immovable positions and unilateral viewpoints which tend to make understanding more difficult and efforts at cooperation ineffective. Possible discrepancies and difficulties will be resolved by tirelessly seeking what unites everyone, with patient and sincere dialogue, and a willingness to listen and accept goals which will bring new hope.

Cuba, look again to the faith of your elders, draw from that faith the strength to build a better future, trust in the Lord's promises, and open your heart to his Gospel so as to renew authentically your personal and social life.

As I bid you a heartfelt *adios*, I ask our Lady of Charity of El Cobre to protect all Cubans under her mantle, to sustain them in the midst of their trials and to obtain from Almighty God the grace that they most desire. *Hasta siempre*, Cuba, a land made beautiful by the maternal presence of Mary. May God bless your future. Thank you!