



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE 24th WORLD DAY OF TOURISM
(27 September 2003)***

1. Next 27 September we will observe the World Day of Tourism, whose theme will be: *"Tourism: an impetus in the fight against poverty, the creation of jobs and social harmony"*. With a view to this important celebration, I would like to propose to everyone, especially the Catholic faithful, some reflections on this topic in the light of the Church's social teaching and the changes occurring on our Planet, which also affect the tourism sector. Tourism, in fact, should be considered as a special expression of social life with economic, financial and cultural implications, as well as consequences that are crucial to individuals and peoples. Its direct relationship with the integral development of the person must orient its service, as with other human activities, to building civilization in the most authentic and complete sense, that is, the civilization of love (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 33). The next World Day will focus attention on tourism in relation to those pockets of poverty that exist on every continent. The drama of poverty is one of the greatest challenges today, when the rift between the different areas of the world is growing deeper despite the availability of the necessary means to remedy it, for humanity has achieved an extraordinary development in science and technology. It is therefore particularly timely "to reaffirm a principle which is self-evident yet often ignored: our goal should not be the benefit of a privileged few, but rather the improvement of the living conditions of all. Only on this foundation can we build that international order truly marked by justice and solidarity which is the hope of everyone" (*Message for Lent 2003*, n. 2; *ORE*, 12 February 2003, p. 6). 2. It is impossible to remain indifferent and inert in the face of poverty and underdevelopment. We cannot withdraw into our own selfish interests, abandoning countless brothers and sisters to a wretched plight, and even worse, leaving many of them to meet with a relentless death. It is vital to find satisfactory economic, financial, technical and political solutions, making use of the creative capacity and generosity that humanity has at its disposal, to put an end to this social and moral scourge. However, as I have had the opportunity to recall on another occasion, "it should not be forgotten that all these measures would be insufficient if they were not inspired by authentic ethical and spiritual values" (*Address to the Ambassador of Bolivia*, n. 3; *ORE*, 28 June 2000, p. 4). Tourist activity can play an important role in the fight against poverty, from the financial as well as the social and cultural viewpoints. Travelling provides an opportunity to become acquainted with different places and situations and to realize what a great gap exists between the rich and poor Countries. It is also possible to make a better use of local resources and activities, fostering the involvement of the poorer classes of the population. The tourist journey or stay is always an encounter with different persons and cultures. Everywhere, but especially in developing Countries, the visitor and the

tourist can hardly avoid coming into contact with the painful reality of poverty and hunger. In this case, people must not only resist the temptation to retreat into a sort of "happy cocoon", distancing themselves from the social context; rather, they should refrain from profiting from their own privileged position to exploit the "needs" of the locals. May their visit, therefore, be an opportunity for dialogue among persons of equal dignity; may it generate a greater knowledge of the local inhabitants, their history and their culture; and may it prompt sincere openness to an understanding of others that is expressed in concrete gestures of solidarity. We must work to ensure that the achievement of well-being for a few privileged individuals is never to the detriment of the quality of life of the many others. Here can be applied what I wrote in a more general sense in my Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* on economic relations: "One must denounce the existence of economic, financial and social mechanisms which, although they are manipulated by people, often function almost automatically, thus accentuating the situation of wealth for some and poverty for the rest.... Later on these mechanisms will have to be subjected to a careful analysis under the ethical-moral aspect" (n. 16).³ The theme of the next World Day of Tourism reminds us of Jesus' words: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit...*" (Mt 5: 3), an ever timely invitation to show solidarity to the poor, the hungry and the needy, which challenges believers. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* recalls, "The Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ... they express the vocation of the faithful... they shed light on the actions and attitudes characteristic of the Christian life" (n. 1717). It would be serious if the disciple of Christ were to forget this precisely in his leisure time or during a tourist trip, that is, when he could be dedicating himself to a broader contemplation of the "face of Christ" in the neighbour with whom he comes into contact. When it is the Lord's teaching that sheds light on life, let us feel bound to ensure that all our activities, including tourist activities, should be an expression of that "new 'creativity' in charity" which makes us close "to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 50). This solidarity is expressed above all in respect for the personal dignity of the local people, their culture and their customs, in a willingness to get to know them through dialogue, aimed at promoting the integral development of each one. On a tourist trip, this attitude becomes yet more demanding the more tangible the differences in civilization, culture, social conditions and religion become. I warmly hope that tourist activity will always be an effective means of alleviating poverty, of fostering the personal and social growth of individuals and peoples, and of the consolidation of participation and cooperation among nations, cultures and religions. May the Blessed Virgin Mary protect all those who in their various capacities are involved in the vast sector of tourism and keep them ever sensitive to those who suffer because of poverty, injustice, war and discrimination. Upon each one I invoke an abundance of divine gifts, as I cordially bless you all. *From the Vatican, 11 June 2003* JOHN PAUL

 II

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n.28 pp.6, 7.
