



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA***

*Washington
Saturday, 6 October 1979*

Mr. President,

I wish to express my most sincere thanks for your kind words of welcome to the White House. It is indeed a great honor for me to meet with the President of the United States during a visit of which the aims are spiritual and religious in nature. May I convey at the same time to you, and through you to all your fellow Americans, my profound respect for all the Federal and State Authorities of this nation and for its beloved people. In the course of the last few days, I have had the opportunity to see some of your cities and rural areas; my only regret is that the time is too short to bring my greetings personally to all parts of this country, but I want to assure you that my esteem and affection go out to every man, woman and child without distinction.

Divine Providence in its own designs has called me from my native Poland to be the Successor of Peter in the See of Rome and the leader of the Catholic Church. It gives me great joy to be the first Pope in history to come to the Capital of this nation, and I thank Almighty God for this blessing.

In accepting your courteous invitation, Mr. President, I have also hoped that our meeting today would serve the cause of world peace, international understanding and the promotion of full respect for human rights everywhere.

Mr. Speaker and Honorable Members of Congress,
Distinguished Members of the Cabinet and of the Judiciary,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your presence here honors me greatly and I deeply appreciate the expression of respect which you thus extend to me. My gratitude goes to each one of you personally for your kind welcome, and to all I wish to say how profoundly I esteem your mission as stewards of the common good of all the people of America.

I come from a nation with a long tradition of deep Christian faith and with a national history marked by many upheavals; for more than a hundred years Poland was even erased from the political map of those values without which no society can prosper: love of freedom, cultural creativity, and the conviction that common endeavors for the good of society must be guided by a true moral sense. My own spiritual and religious mission impels me to be the messenger of peace and brotherhood, and to witness to the true greatness of every human person. This greatness derives from the love of God, who created us in his own likeness and gave us an eternal destiny. It is in this dignity of the human person that I see the meaning of history, and that I find the principle that gives sense to the role which every human being has to assume for his or her own advancement and for the well-being of the society to which he or she belongs. It is with these sentiments that I greet in you the whole American people, a people that bases its concept of life on spiritual and moral values, on a deep religious sense, on respect for duty and on generosity in the service of humanity—noble traits which are embodied in a particular way in the nation's Capital, with its monuments dedicated to such outstanding national figures as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson.

I greet the American people in their elected representatives, all of you who serve in Congress to chart, through legislation, the path that will lead every citizen of this country towards the fullest development of his or her potential, and the nation as a whole towards assuming its share of the responsibility for building a world of true freedom and justice. I greet America in all who are vested with authority, which can only be seen as an opportunity for serving your fellow-citizens in the overall development of their true humanity and in the full and unimpeded enjoyment of all their fundamental rights. I salute the people of this land also in the members of the Judiciary, who are servants of humanity in the application of justice, and who thus hold in their hands the awesome power of profoundly affecting, by their decisions, the lives of every individual.

For all of you I pray to Almighty God that he may grant you the gift of wisdom in your decisions, prudence in your words and actions, and compassion in the exercise of the authority that is yours, so that in your noble office you will always render true service to the people.

God bless America !

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