



The Holy See

Apostolic Journey to Portugal (May 10-13, 1991)

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS***

Friday, 10 May 1991

1. The desire to respond to an insistent invitation from the Christian communities of the Azores and Madeira has brought me again to this country which is so hospitable to all of us here today. Mindful of the celebration of five centuries of evangelization and meeting of cultures, I come with joy and profound respect to visit these westernmost regions of Europe where, in the first years of the fifteenth century, the crossings to the South Atlantic and America began.

I attach particular importance to this meeting with you, credentialed workers for good relations among peoples. Your worthy and complex task on behalf of ever more human international relations is regarded with real sympathy by the Holy See, which feels an obligation to share in and to help your diplomatic mission. To your Dean, Archbishop Luciano Angeloni, I express my gratitude for the cordial welcome and good wishes extended to me. I present respectful greetings of solidarity to the States whose worthy representatives abroad you are; my greetings to the ladies and gentlemen here present.

2. I thank you for the attention and friendly understanding that you have given to the Holy See's activity on behalf of international relations, and also to the basic guiding principles found in the broader area of the Church's social doctrine to which we dedicate this centenary year of the Encyclical *Rerum novarum* of our venerable predecessor, Leo XIII. This encyclical is a basic document for the development of the Church's social teaching and pastoral activity in our time; its most recent application, the Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, was published a few days ago.

Our social teaching is based on and inspired by the human being, who is considered as the protagonist in the building of society. It regards humans, however, as created in the image and

likeness of God and called to form this image in their individual and communal lives. In this perspective the Church presents an ideal of society in solidarity and in service of humankind open to the transcendent, helping people to discover the truth that will make them happy in the midst of the diverse offerings of the dominant ideologies.

3. The mandate and mission of the Church on behalf of a more pronounced political ethic, all the more necessary today because of the existence of such a great technological variety, causes me to direct your attention to individual and collective human rights. May these rights be respected always and everywhere, not only for motives of political convenience, but in virtue of the profound respect due to each and every person as a creature of God endowed with a unique dignity and called to a transcendent destiny! Every offence against a human being is also an offence against God, which must be accounted for before the Lord, just Judge of actions and intentions.

Among these rights, I would emphasise the freedom of the human conscience which is directly linked to truth both natural and revealed. I would do so because in some countries new forms of fundamentalism are emerging which, in the name of false motives of religion, race and even the State, work against human dignity, freedom of faith, cultural identity and mutual human understanding. "In a world like ours, where it is rare that the inhabitants of a country belong to the same ethnic group or to a single religion, it is absolutely essential for domestic and international peace that respect for each person's conscience be a principle without exception" (New Year's Speech to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition of 14 January 1991). Your countries will strengthen themselves through the promotion of a careful training in respect for others, by means of knowledge of other cultures and religions and a balanced understanding of the diversity that exists today.

4. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: I want to express best wishes for the peoples whom you represent, for the authorities who have appointed you, for yourselves, your colleagues and families. I promise my prayer to God the Father of all that the light and energies from on high will make it possible to bring together the tremendous concentration of wisdom will and creativity that is absolutely demanded by the difficulties among the nations today.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n. 20 p.9.

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