



The Holy See

DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II

AL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA AUSTRIACA

THOMAS KLESTIL **Venerdì, 25 novembre 1994 Mr. President,*¹ It is with great joy that I receive you today, the Head of State of the Austrian Republic, accompanied by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and other important personages. I gladly granted your request for this meeting, with deepest gratitude for your visit, I bid you a cordial welcome.² I still have such fond memories of my two Pastoral Visits to your country which gave me, as I already had before, a strong impression of Austria's rich Christian and cultural heritage. Contributing this heritage to the sphere of the European community and protecting it is a responsibility-laden task for the Republic of Austria. In connection with this, please allow me also to mention the high degree of political maturity shown by the citizens of your country regarding the question of entering the European Community. Looking at Austria's heritage, it becomes quite clear that first and foremost the ethical aspect of culture also has a significant role. In its more or less demanding forms culture also deals with values, and ultimately with the truth: «While paying heed to every fragment of truth which [the Christian] encounters in the life experience and culture of individuals and of nations, he will not fail to affirm in dialogue with others all that his faith and the correct use of reason have enabled him to understand» (Centesimus annus, n. 46). Thus the emphasis in culture cannot be placed only on the quality and intensity of experience or on its degree of interest. If your country would be true to the demands of its cultural origins, it will be the task of your citizens Mr. President, to care for the precious heritage of the Christian faith in its rich cultural development, and its intrinsic system of values. Even if the faith can never be limited to certain cultural settings and expressions and must therefore be open to new, perhaps even unusual forms of expression it is still necessary to handle the rich, multi faceted cultural heritage with care. At present there is a certain reflection about the continued development of culture, astonishment in the face of sensation seeking, total willfulness, the lack of the transcendent and negligence in dealing with Christianity as a leaven of European culture. Over many centuries your citizens have developed a culture of life based on faith. Shaping this culture anew, conducting a discernment of spirits in everyday things, and clarifying anew fundamental values in the family and education will be essential for the future of Europe. The Christians of our culture could offer no greater service. I trust, Mr. President that those with responsibility in your beloved country will devote themselves entirely to this goal.³ In political, social and moral activity it is the human being as a personal subject who must be seen as the priority. In the Republic of Austria in recent decades the realization of this principle was accomplished to a high degree. Your country opened its gates to refugees who had been persecuted and discriminated against in their homeland. Your country has legally established exemplary protection for ethnic minorities and, last of all has accomplished admirable achievements in providing humanitarian aid for those in need. I would like to express my cordial thanks to all those in positions of responsibility and to all the citizens. May God reward them all abundantly. On the basis of this great regard for human beings and their worth, your country will be able to overcome the isolated symptoms of violence and propensity to violence against

strangers and other groups of marginalized persons. Violence can ultimately be overcome only by education in non-violent behaviour and the rule of law. This is one of the priority tasks in the field of education. It is the only way that people will be able to «honour» one another: «The “principle of giving honour”, the recognition and respect due to man precisely because he is a man, is the basic condition for every authentic educational process» (Letter to Families, n. 16).⁴ Through the intercession of the Mother of God and all the heavenly patrons of your homeland, I pray for God's constant protection for you, Mr. President, and for all the faithful and people of good will in your beloved country. As a pledge of this I cordially impart my Apostolic

Blessing.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n. 50 p.4. © Copyright 1994 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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