



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO ROMANIA

**ADDRESS OF THE POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CIVIL AND POLITICAL AUTHORITIES***

Friday, 7 may 1999

*Mr President,
Presidents of the Senate and the Assembly of Deputies,
Members of the Government and the Constituent Bodies,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Representatives of the different Religious Communities,*

1. In accepting your invitation to visit Romania, I am delighted, Mr President, to stand on the soil of your country for the first time. I warmly thank you for your welcome and the courteous words you have just spoken to me in your own name and in the name of the nation's authorities. I greet the members of the Constituent Bodies and the representatives of the Romanian people, as well as the members of the Religious Communities and the Diplomatic Corps: in addition, I extend my most cordial greetings to those responsible for public life, to the people who helped organize my visit and to all Romanians.

2. I come to your land as a *pilgrim of peace, brotherhood and understanding within nations, between peoples and among the disciples of Christ*. During different stages of my journey, I will meet the various ecclesial communities as well as the people of Romania. I very cordially thank *His Beatitude Teoctist*, Patriarch of Romania, for his words of welcome this morning. Our meeting and the moments of prayer we will share are an eloquent testimony of Gospel brotherhood. After the last Council and in view of the Great Jubilee, these *gestures make an important mark on the path of unity among Christians*. I hope that the pastors and faithful will commit themselves in turn to concrete dialogue and mutual acceptance, which will show that fraternal charity in Christ is not an empty phrase, but an essential element of the Church and of Christian life.

3. I also wish to greet *the Catholic Bishops of Romania*, as well as all *the members of their Latin, Greek-Catholic and Armenian communities*. I assure them of my fatherly and fraternal affection. In again expressing to them my admiration for the work they accomplished in their trials with fidelity and courage, I am delighted with their pastoral activity in communion with the Successor of Peter, a sign of the unity of Christ's Body and of their involvement in Romanian society.

4. I am pleased to meet *the members of the Diplomatic Corps*; their presence shows the attention of the neighbouring States, of Europe and of the whole world to Romania, its internal development and its foreign relations. I hope that the international community will strengthen its aid to nations which, emerging from the yoke of communism, have to reorganize their economic and social life; these countries will thus become artisans of peace and prosperity for their inhabitants and even more responsible partners in international life.

5. The presence of representatives from the various Religious Communities invites me to stress *the essential role of the Churches*. It is their task to be artisans of peace, solidarity and fraternity, so that they will not act as antagonists, but *as collaborators* in the common good, rejecting everything that can exacerbate the conflicts, passions and ideologies which in past decades tried to prevail over individuals, local human communities and the principles of freedom and truth. While respecting the autonomy of temporal affairs, their spiritual mission invites them to be sentinels in the world, in order to *call attention to the values which are the basis of social life* and to identify from a human and spiritual standpoint any failure to show due respect to every person, to his dignity and to his basic freedoms, especially religious freedom and freedom of conscience.

6. Romania is going through a period of transition which is crucial for its future, for its more active involvement in the construction of Europe and for its presence on the international scene. My thoughts turn to *those who are undergoing trials*, especially those who are seriously affected by the economic crisis and those in situations of poverty or illness, as well as the families who are finding it difficult to provide for their needs. I invite all Romanians to show their solidarity, thus offering concrete proof that living in the same region creates *strong ties of brotherhood*. No one should feel excluded or use the slowness of the changes as a pretext for despairing or for dissociating themselves from the common path. Each person is responsible for his brothers and sisters and for the country's future.

7. Forty years of atheistic communism have left after-effects and scars on your people's flesh and memory, and have created a climate of distrust; none of this can disappear without a real effort of conversion by citizens in their personal lives and in their relations with the national community as a whole. Each must reach out to his brothers and sisters, so that growth and development benefit everyone, particularly those who have suffered the negative effects of the different crises of the past. Your people are rich in undreamed-of resources, in self-confidence and in solidarity. In the strength of these values, they are called to *develop an art of living together* which is an infusion of soul and humanity. Solidarity and trust require of all social leaders a concerted effort and respect

for the different levels of intervention, as well as persevering commitment and an attitude of honesty on the part of all who must deal with social matters. *A common destiny* can truly be established on this basis. I encourage the people of Romania to work on building a society at the service of all and to let Christ's message touch them, as their ancestors have done since apostolic times, showing how Christian, spiritual, moral and human values hold an important place in the life of a country.

8. The disruptions that followed the events of 1989 have increased the differences between citizens. The difficulties in the democratic transition sometimes lead to discouragement. The path of democratic life comes above all through a civic education of all citizens so that they can take an active and responsible part in public life in their local communities and at all levels of society. Formed in a civic spirit, people will become aware that development is not only a matter of structures but also involves mental attitudes. It is advisable, especially for the young, to regain trust in their country and not to be tempted to emigrate. Moreover, it is important that a State concerned about harmony and peace be attentive to all the individuals who live in the national territory, without exclusion. In fact, a nation has the duty to do everything possible to strengthen national unity based on the equality of all its inhabitants, regardless of their origin or religion, and to develop their sense of openness to foreigners.

Of course, the territorial changes which have led to the unification of peoples with different ethnic and religious backgrounds have created a complex socioreligious mosaic, especially in Transylvania. It is with patience and above all the desire to succeed in the art of living together that, *thanks to national and religious harmony*, it will be possible to overcome conflicts and fears. "It is necessary to pass from antagonism and conflict to a situation where each party recognizes the other as a partner" (*Ut unum sint*, n. 29). If history cannot be forgotten, it is by adhering to respect for the rights of minorities and to dialogue, with the desire for forgiveness and reconciliation, that *citizens can meet again today as partners, and even more, as brothers and sisters*.

9. I would now like to mention *the welcome Romania so generously gave my compatriots and the Polish Government* during the Second World War. I would also like *to pay homage to the outpouring of generosity* that many people were capable of at the time of the events of 1989. Today these are signs, among many others, that can prompt courageous and persevering attitudes which create a society where everyone can live well.

10. I am grateful to you, Mr President, for inviting me to share your country's history for a few hours, and for allowing me to meet the Catholic communities and to take an important step on the path of Christian unity in my contacts with the Romanian Orthodox Church. I invoke an abundance of divine blessings upon you, your family and everyone here, as well as on all the people of Romania. Thank you.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n.19 p.4.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana