



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO A GROUP OF PILGRIMS FROM VENEZUELA

*Thursday 11 May 2000 Dear Brothers and Sisters from Venezuela,*¹. I cordially greet you and am happy to welcome you. Welcome to Rome and to the Vatican, which preserves the memory of the Apostle St Peter! The providential time of the Jubilee has brought you as pilgrims to the city of Rome, in order to confirm your faith in Christ and to reaffirm your commitment to living in the spirit of the Gospel. Your presence in great numbers is proof of the close and unbroken bonds of communion and affection which unite the Church in Venezuela with the Successor of Peter. It also reminds me of the beloved days that Providence allowed me to spend in your homeland on the occasion of my two apostolic visits. During them I was able to see the firmness of your faith and all that the Church is doing among you, helping by her voice and institutions to elevate the life of all Venezuelans. 2. I am grateful to Archbishop Ignacio Velasco García of Caracas for his kind words expressing the sentiments that brought you on your Jubilee pilgrimage to the Eternal City, the witness of the martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul, the pillars of the Church. In thanking him for the sentiments he also expressed in your name, I would like to greet you all: the priests, the religious, the young people and all the other members of the faithful who make up this group.³ We are observing the year of the Great Jubilee, which offers us the opportunity to approach the treasures of grace and mercy that God has entrusted to his Church. The Lord asks everyone who yearns for courageous interior renewal to draw near to him with trust. He asks each one for a change in mentality and lifestyle, in order to follow the Lord closely and in this way to face the realities of daily life in the spirit of the Gospel. To follow Christ radically calls for intense and constant inner growth. For this it is necessary to pray diligently, to take part in the Eucharist and the sacrament of Penance with the greatest frequency possible and to practise the Gospel virtues. In your country you can already rely on the witnesses to Christ who have been raised to the glory of the altars. I am referring to Bl. María de San José, whom I had the honour of beatifying amid the joy of all Venezuelans. May her example and teaching always instil enthusiasm and courage for following Christ with ever greater determination. Thus you will be prepared to face the difficulties of our time and the challenges of the new evangelization with trust and hope.⁴ Among these difficulties I cannot forget the unspeakable tragedy that struck your country last year, causing many deaths and widespread destruction. From the first moment I prayed to the Lord for the deceased, asking for consolation, serenity and light for those who, amid such great sorrow, were faced with the arduous task of rebuilding. I also appealed for international cooperation, urging Venezuela's fellow nations not to abandon her at such a time and to collaborate in repairing the damage caused by a natural disaster of such great proportions. I therefore encourage you to continue to be close to those still suffering the tragic consequences of that situation, to show solidarity to one another, to be concerned about the destiny of your neighbour, even at the cost of sacrifice.⁵ The other challenge of the present moment is to continue on the path of the new evangelization. Evangelizing, as you know well, my dear brothers and sisters, is the

mission of every baptized person. Whatever his state in life, everyone is called to bear witness to Christ and the Gospel. I hope that your pilgrimage will bring the desired fruits of religious and pastoral renewal. May God grant that your visit to the tombs of the Apostles will strengthen your determination to avoid sin, to be converted to the good and to follow the Lord. Evangelization will also help to make the values of God's kingdom present in society at a time when your nation is reviewing its legislative and institutional organization. In this regard, it is important that Christians make their voices heard, so that Gospel values will continue to be present in your homeland and will not be excluded for any reason.⁶ I entrust the intentions that have brought you on your Jubilee pilgrimage to the Virgin Mary, whom you venerate under the title of Our Lady of Coromoto and whom I had the joy of crowning, and I implore from her the grace for you to be authentic missionaries of the unfathomable love of God in Venezuelan society. May you be protected by Sts Peter and Paul, whose tombs you have visited with devotion. The Pope again expresses his affection and imparts a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to your loved ones and to all the Venezuelan faithful.

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