



# The Holy See

---

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO H.E. MR GUNKATSU KANO, AMBASSADOR OF JAPAN  
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE\***

*Friday, 30 May 2003*

*Mr Ambassador,* I am pleased to welcome Your Excellency on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to the Holy See. I thank you for the respectful greetings you have conveyed to me from His Imperial Highness Emperor Akihito. I would be grateful if you would reciprocate by expressing my cordial good wishes to him for his well-being and for the whole imperial family. I also extend good wishes to the members of the Government and to all the Japanese people, in the hope that they may continue without respite their courageous efforts to build a nation that is increasingly united and supportive, attentive to the human person who is the centre of every society, and to human dignity. In particular, I express my good wishes to those who were injured in the recent earthquake. I was touched by your kind words. They witness to the attention your country pays to developing active and fruitful relations with the Holy See. You recall, Mr Ambassador, how eager your nation is to serve the cause of peace. The international situation today is disturbing; it is marked by recurrent tension in various parts of the globe and by an upsurge of terrorist activity. However, these circumstances must not dampen the determination of all who are already involved in the search for peaceful solutions to settle the conflicts. To make a significant contribution to international security and stability, it is important that nations express ever more clearly their effective desire to play an active part in the common process of reducing the tensions and threats of war. Unremitting efforts must be made in a balanced and controlled way to progressively eliminate weapons of mass destruction and further non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament; thus, the conditions of the security of peoples and the preservation of all of creation will be properly guaranteed. It is also up to the international community to be permanently mobilized to guard against potential acts of aggression at global and regional levels, so that appropriate measures may be taken that do not jeopardize the fundamental needs of the civil populations concerned which may lead to poverty and despair. I am convinced that a concerted political will and enlightened ethical reflection will enable nations to be the protagonists of a true culture of peace, based on respect for human life and the primacy of law in its dimension of justice and equity, and geared to the patient building of peaceful coexistence between nations and the promotion of the common good. Japan, Mr Ambassador, has a wealth of religious and philosophical traditions, containing spiritual resources which can effectively stimulate this ardent desire to work for peace and reconciliation among human communities and individuals. Likewise, through the

painful vision of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, your country continues to be a living witness of the tragedies of the 20th century, inviting everyone to repeat, after Pope Paul VI, "*Never again war!*", for war endangers the very future of humanity (cf. *Paul VI, Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization*, 4 October 1965, n. 5). I hope that your country will work unremittingly to put these exalted values at the service of peace in the region and in the world. As I recalled in my *Message for World Day of Peace 2003*, "the question of peace cannot be separated from the question of human dignity and human rights" (n. 6; *ORE*, 18/25 December 2002, p. 4). Furthermore, the efforts that Japan has made possible, especially in the area of economic cooperation with the Asian countries as well as in setting up aid programmes to help poor countries become the protagonists of their own development, highlight the active role your country has played in the advancement of peoples. In this perspective, your country's reflection on ecological problems and the place of the human being should also be pointed out. It is to be hoped that the International Exhibition of Aichi, scheduled to take place in 2005, will enable the many nations participating calmly to discuss concrete solutions to the problems connected, among other things, with the preservation of the environment and the management of natural resources. The safeguard of creation is a moral duty for all. The Creator wanted men and women to be worthy of their vocation, managing nature not as ruthless exploiters but as responsible stewards (cf. Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, n. 15). This also means leaving to the future generations an earth that is fit on which to live. Mr Ambassador, may I address through you my affectionate greetings to the Bishops and the Catholic community of your country. Although her members are but few, the Catholic Church is constantly concerned to offer to the young Japanese generations, especially through an integral education imparted at schools and universities, an effective contribution to their human, spiritual, moral and civic growth that equips them to take an active part in national life. Schools also play an important role in evangelization, "inculturating the faith, teaching the ways of openness and respect, and fostering interreligious understanding" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 37). The Church also wants to welcome the many immigrants who come to Japan in search of work, dignity and hope. With all people of good will, she is determined to combat the phenomena of discrimination and exclusion, which alienate the weakest and impair relations between men and women. By her commitment, she wants to encourage all the members of the Japanese nation to question themselves about the meaning of life and human destiny. She invites each one to build responsibly a fraternal and equitable society which expresses its values in the first place through the establishment of a system of penal justice increasingly in conformity with human dignity (cf. *Appeal of the Bishops' Conference of Japan to Mr Kokichi Shimoinaba, Minister of Justice*, 21 November 1997). With affection, I invite Catholics to be enthusiastic artisans of peace and charity, strongly united around their pastors, working for a more and more fruitful encounter between the faith and Japanese culture. As you begin your mission, I offer you my cordial wishes for the noble task that awaits you. Rest assured that you will find here with my collaborators the attentive and understanding welcome you may need. I cordially invoke upon His Imperial Highness Emperor Akihito, on the imperial family, on the Japanese people and their leaders, on you, Your Excellency, and on all who are close to you, as well as on the embassy staff, an abundance of divine

---

Benefits.

\**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n.25 p.4. © Copyright 2003 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana