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Letter of the Holy Father on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Saint John Paul II's Apostolic Journey to Cuba

The following is the letter sent by the Holy Father Francis on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Saint John Paul II's Apostolic Journey to Cuba:

Letter of the Holy Father

To the Holy Faithful People of God on their pilgrimage in Cuba

Dear brothers and sisters:

Twenty-five years have passed since Saint John Paul II's apostolic journey to Cuba, a moment of grace and blessing for all. In the context of this anniversary, the bishops of this Episcopal Conference have had the courtesy to invite Cardinal Beniamino Stella, who in those years as apostolic nuncio was a privileged witness of that event, to visit you, and I have asked him to bring you my greetings and blessing, expressing the Pope's closeness to each one of you, to His Eminence Cardinal Juan de la Caridad García Rodríguez, to the bishops, priests and seminarians, to the men and women religious and to all the lay faithful.

During this time, I would like you to recall in your hearts the gestures and words that my predecessor addressed to you during his Visit, so that they may echo strongly in the present, and give a new impetus to continue building the future of this nation with hope and determination. One of his exhortations at that time was: "With fortitude and temperance, with justice and prudence, face the great challenges of the present moment; return to your Cuban and Christian roots, and do all that you can to build a future of ever greater dignity and freedom! Do not forget that freedom involves responsibility. A person is defined above all by his responsible behaviour towards others and before history" (Message to the young people of Cuba, 23 January 1998).

I also encourage you to return to your Cuban and Christian roots, that is to say, to your own identity, which has generated and continues to generate the life of this country. Those roots have been strengthened, allowing us to

see them grow and flourish in the witness of so many of you who work and sacrifice every day for others, not only for your families, but also for your neighbours and friends, for all people, and especially for those most in need. Thank you for this example of collaboration and mutual help that unites you and reveals the spirit that characterizes you: open, welcoming and supportive. Continue to walk together in hope, knowing that always, and particularly in the midst of adversity and suffering, Jesus and his Blessed Mother accompany you, help you to carry your cross and console you with the joy of the resurrection.

As a sign of my closeness to and communion with the beloved Cuban people, who possess great writers and artists, I would like to recall some words of Father Varela, which express the need to be rooted in the goodness and fruitfulness of this effort: "Once the tree is rooted, it will soon spread its branches, and virtue will rest in its shade". This tree full of vitality may well represent the man who has rooted his trust in the Lord, as the prophet Jeremiah says: "He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green" (*Jer* 17:8). Trusting in the God of life, I invite you to continue to dig deep into your own roots with courage and responsibility, and to continue to bear fruit united in faith, hope and charity.

May Jesus bless the Cuban people and may Our Lady of Charity of *El Cobre* watch over and accompany you. I pray for you and ask you, please, to pray for me.

Fraternally yours,

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 8 December 2022

FRANCIS
