



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr EDUARDO DELGADO BERMÚDEZ
NEW AMBASSADOR OF CUBA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 10 December 2009

Mr Ambassador,

I receive you with great pleasure at this solemn ceremony in which you are presenting the Letters that accredit you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Cuba to the Holy See and with which the important mission that your Government has entrusted to you begins. I am grateful for your kind words and for the greeting you have conveyed to me from H.E. Mr Raúl Castro Ruz, President of the Council of State and of the Council of Ministers, which I reciprocate with my very best wishes for his lofty responsibility.

Between aspirations and difficulties, Cuba has achieved a decisive protagonism, mainly in the economic and political context of the Caribbean and of Latin America. On the other hand, certain signs of détente in relations with the neighbouring United States promise new opportunities for a beneficial mutual rapprochement, with full respect for the sovereignty and rights of the States and of their citizens. Cuba, which continues to offer numerous countries its collaboration in vital areas such as literacy and health care, thereby encourages international cooperation and solidarity, without subordinating them to interests other than aid to needy peoples. It is to be hoped that all this may contribute to making the appeal that my venerable Predecessor, Pope [John Paul II](#), launched during his historic Visit to the Island, a reality. He said, "May Cuba, with all its magnificent potential, open itself up to the world, and may the world open itself up to Cuba" ([Address at Arrival Ceremony, José Martí Airport, Havana, 21 January 1998](#)).

Like many countries, your Homeland is also suffering the consequences of the serious world crisis which, in addition to the devastating effects of the natural disasters and the economic embargo, is

affecting the poorest people and families in particular. In this complex general situation, the urgent need for an economy, built on sound ethical foundations, that makes the person and his rights, both his material and his spiritual good, the focus of its interests increasingly felt. In fact, the primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 25).

It is important that Governments endeavour to remedy the serious effects of the financial crisis but without neglecting the basic needs of the citizens. The Catholic Church in Cuba, which at this time as always feels close to the people, desires to contribute with her modest and effective help. She likewise wishes to stress that the broad cooperation achieved with the Authorities of your country has made possible the implementation of important projects of assistance and reconstruction, specially on the occasion of natural disasters.

I hope that the practical signs of openness to the exercise of religious freedom will continue to increase, just as has happened in recent years, for example, with the possibility of celebrating Holy Mass in some prisons, of having religious processions, of the restoration or restitution of certain church buildings, of constructing several houses for religious and the provision of social security for priests and religious. Thus the Catholic community will be able to carry out its specific pastoral task with greater ease. With a view to advancing on this path, especially for the benefit of Cuban citizens it would also be desirable that dialogue continue, in order to establish jointly similar forms to those established with other nations, with respect for your country's own features, the juridical framework that appropriately defines the existing relations between the Holy See and Cuba which have never been interrupted and which guarantee the appropriate development of the Church's life and pastoral action in this nation.

The Catholic Church in your Homeland is concentrating on the preparations for the celebration in 2012 of the Fourth Centenary of the discovery and presence of the blessed image of the *Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre* [Our Lady of Charity of Cuba], Mother and Patroness of Cuba. This beloved Marian title is a luminous symbol of the religious feeling of the Cuban people and of the Christian roots of their culture. Indeed, the Church, which cannot be confused with the political community (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 76), is the depository of an extraordinary spiritual and moral heritage which has contributed to definitively forging the Cuban "soul", giving it its own character and personality. In this regard, all the men and women and especially youth, today, as in any other epoch, need to rediscover those moral, human and spiritual values, such as, for example, respect for life from its conception until its natural end, which make human life more dignified. In this regard, the main service that the Church offers to Cubans is the proclamation of Jesus Christ and his message of love, forgiveness and reconciliation in truth. A people that walks on this path of harmony is a people with hope for a better future.

Furthermore, the Church, conscious that her mission would be incomplete without the witness of charity that is born from the Heart of Christ, has implemented numerous projects of social

assistance in your Homeland which, although they are small, reach out to many sick, elderly and disabled people. An obvious demonstration of this love is also the life and work of so many people who have let themselves be illuminated and transformed by Christ's message, such as Bl. José Olallo Valdés, whose beatification the first ever to be celebrated in Cuba was attended by the H.E. the President of the Council of State and of the Council of Ministers.

I am also confident that this atmosphere which has enabled the Church to make her modest charitable contribution will also encourage her participation in the means of social communication and in the realization of complementary educational tasks, in conformity with her own specific pastoral and spiritual mission.

I do not want to conclude without directing a thought to the ever noble, plucky, long-suffering and hard-working Cuban people, expressing to them my heartfelt closeness and affection, while at the same time not omitting to entrust them to the Lord, the Author of all gifts, in my prayers. Mr Ambassador, I ask you kindly to convey my respectful greeting to the highest Authorities of the Republic of Cuba. At the same time I express to you, Your Excellency, my best wishes that you may felicitously and fruitfully fulfil your lofty mission to the Holy See which begins today and, through the intercession of *Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Cobre*, I invoke upon you, upon your family and upon your collaborators abundant gifts from the Most High.

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