



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II DURING HIS VISIT TO BATTERY PARK

*Manhattan, New York
Wednesday, 3 October 1979*

Dear friends,

My visit to your City would not have been complete without coming to Battery Park, without seeing Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty in the distance. Every nation has its historical symbols. They may be shrines or statues or documents; but their significance lies in the truths they represent to the citizens of a nation and in the image they convey to other nations. Such a symbol in the United States is the Statue of Liberty. This is an impressive symbol of what the United States has stood for from the very beginning of its history; this is a symbol of freedom. It reflects the immigrant history of the United States, for it was freedom that millions of human beings were looking for on these shores. And it was freedom that the young Republic offered in compassion. On this spot, I wish to pay homage to this noble trait of America and its people : its desire to be free, its determination to preserve freedom, and its willingness to share this freedom with others. May the ideal of liberty, of freedom remain a moving force for your nation and for all the nations in the world today !

It greatly honors your country and its citizens that on this foundation of liberty you have built a nation where the dignity of every human person is to be respected, where a religious sense and a strong family structure are fostered, where duty and honest work are held in high esteem, where generosity and hospitality are no idle words, and where the right to religious liberty is deeply rooted in your history.

Yesterday, before the General Assembly of the United Nations, I made a plea for peace and

justice based on the full respect of all the fundamental rights of the human person. I also spoke of religious freedom because it regards a person's relationship to God, and because it is related in a special way to other human rights. It is closely allied with the right to freedom of conscience. If conscience is not secure in society, then the security of all others rights is threatened.

Liberty, in all its aspects, must be based on truth. I want to repeat here the words of Jesus "the truth will make you free" (*Jn 8 :32*). It is then my wish that your sense of freedom may always go hand in hand with a profound sense of truth and honesty about yourselves and about the realities of your society. Past achievements can never be an acceptable substitute for present responsibilities toward the common good of the society you live in and towards your fellow-citizens. Just as the desire for freedom is a universal aspiration in the world today, so is the quest for justice. No institution or organization can credibly stand for freedom today if it does not also support the quest for justice, for both are essential demands of the human spirit.

3. It will always remain one of the glorious achievements of this nation that, when people looked towards America, they received together with freedom also a chance for their own advancement. This tradition must be honored also today. The freedom that was gained must be ratified each day by the firm rejection of whatever wounds, weakens or dishonors human life. And so I appeal to all who love freedom and justice to give a chance to all in need, to the poor and the powerless. Break open the hopeless cycles of poverty and ignorance that are still the lot of too many of our brothers and sisters; the hopeless cycles of prejudices that linger on despite enormous progress toward effective equality in education and employment; the cycles of despair in which are imprisoned all those that lack decent food, shelter or employment ; the cycles of underdevelopment that are the consequence of international mechanisms that subordinate human existence to the domination of partially conceived economic progress; and finally the inhuman cycles of war that springs from the violation of man's fundamental rights and produces still graver violations of them.

Freedom in justice will bring a new dawn of hope for the present generation as it has done before: for the homeless, for the unemployed, for the aging, for the sick and the handicapped, for the migrants and the undocumented workers, for all who hunger for human dignity in this land and in the world.

4. With sentiments of admiration and with confidence in your potential for true human greatness, I wish to greet in you the rich variety of your nation, where people of different ethnic origins and creeds can live, work and prosper together in freedom and mutual respect. I greet and I thank for their cordial welcome all those who have joined me here, businessmen and laborers, scholars and managers, social workers and civil servants, old and young. I greet you with respect, esteem and love. My warm greetings go to each and every group: to my fellow Catholics, to the members of the different Christian Churches with whom I am united in the faith in Jesus Christ.

And I address a special word of greeting to the leaders of the Jewish community whose presence

here honors me greatly. A few months ago, I met with an international group of Jewish representatives in Rome. On that occasion, recalling the initiatives undertaken following the Second Vatican Council under my predecessor Paul VI, I stated that "our two communities are connected and closely related at the very level of their respective religious identities", and that on this basis "we recognize with utmost clarity that the path along which we should proceed is one of fraternal dialogue and fruitful collaboration" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, [March 12-13, 1979](#)). I am glad to ascertain that this same path has been followed here, in the United States, by large sections of both communities and their respective authorities and representative bodies. Several common programs of study, mutual knowledge, a common determination to reject all forms of antisemitism and discrimination, and various forms of collaboration for the human advancement inspired by our common biblical heritage, have created deep and permanent links between Jews and Catholics. As one who in my homeland has shared the suffering of your brethren, I greet you with the word taken from the Hebrew language: Shalom ! Peace be with you.

And to everyone here I offer the expression of my respect, my esteem and my fraternal love. May God bless all of you ! May God bless New York !

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