



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Dr Marián Servátka,
AMBASSADOR OF SLOVAKIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 9 October 1998

Mr Ambassador,

1. It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you as you present the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic to the Holy See.

I ask you to express to Mr Vladimír Mečiar, the outgoing Prime Minister, my heartfelt gratitude for the courteous greeting you have conveyed. I, in turn, offer my best wishes for the newly elected Government, so that Slovakia may continue with renewed enthusiasm on the path to democracy, freedom and social justice.

If we look at events over the last decade, we can observe how the Holy See and the Slovak nation have gradually re-established and consolidated their mutual and ancient bonds. My pastoral visit to Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia in 1990; the establishment of diplomatic relations at the level of Embassy and Apostolic Nunciature with the newly independent Slovak Republic — and here my gratitude goes to your distinguished predecessor, Mr Anton Neuwirth, the first Ambassador to the Holy See; the unforgettable apostolic visit to Slovakia in 1995; the meetings with the Bishops and the weekly gatherings with Slovak pilgrims: all these events are steps on a providential journey in which the Successor of Peter has come to know the situation in Slovakia. For this we must thank the Lord.

2. Mr. Ambassador, I have listened with deep appreciation to what you said about my Predecessors who have taken historically significant decisions regarding the Slovak people. In thanking you for the sentiments expressed in this interesting historical retrospective, I wish to

assure you that the Holy See will continue to offer its support to the beloved nation you represent, as it does to every people which peacefully struggles to affirm its legitimate aspirations for freedom and to make its contribution in the international community.

At this delicate historical moment, it is more necessary than ever for the Slovak people to remain faithful to their spiritual and cultural roots. These roots, in fact, need to be rediscovered and revitalized, especially by the new generations, whose duty is thus to follow the path of authentic progress in a changed and complex context such as that of today's Europe. Even in the face of inevitable difficulties, we must always strive to make Europe a common home from the Atlantic to the Urals, rich in its many cultural traditions, open to the world and sympathetic towards developing peoples. In this context Slovakia offers the legacy of Sts Cyril and Methodius, of human values enriched by the Gospel and refined in the crucible of harsh trials and suffering.

3. The desired ethical and cultural renewal calls for efficient, professional formation at all levels, provided by suitably prepared teachers and professors. As you are well aware, this is one of the areas where the Church, during her 2,000-year journey, has spent great energy, driven by a passion for integral human advancement and by the many charisms involved in the specific field of education. I am pleased to see that in recent years the Slovak school system has resumed the teaching of religion and has given life back to Catholic schools. I sincerely hope that everyone has the opportunity to attend these schools, because the Church wishes to make the services offered by her institutions available to all. In this regard, I gladly second your hope that this process will soon be crowned with the opening of a Catholic university.

The foundation of all society is the family. I willingly take this occasion to invite the Government authorities to develop and encourage political and social action for families, not just in charitable terms but in structural ones as well, that is, by recognizing the central role which belongs to the family institution founded on the indissoluble bond of marriage and which it carries out, often at the cost of great sacrifice. In this area the Ecclesial Community will not fail to offer its constant support, primarily at the formative level, by fostering the birth and growth of solid, mature families; and then by encouraging among them that solidarity which, if it is the fruit and expression of Gospel newness, benefits the social fabric as a whole.

4. I am pleased, Mr Ambassador, that, as you emphasized, the Slovak nation feels deeply and actively involved in the path to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. Although by its nature this Holy Year is a spiritual event for Catholics, for all Christians and, more generally, for every believer and every pilgrim on earth, it represents for all peoples a significant epochal milestone, a confirmation, as it were, of their historical vocation. This is eminently true for those nations — including Slovaks — which began their journey over 1,000 years ago under the sign of Christ and his Gospel.

Thus, the preparation for the Jubilee could be an opportunity for your country to see whether its political programmes effectively respect and promote the human person and his rights from the

moment of conception; whether the process of democratizing society is making headway; whether the culture of life, reconciliation and solidarity is effectively promoted by opposing the facile tendency to individualism, consumerism and hedonism which, under the guise of false ideals of freedom, often results in heavy burdens for the weakest.

5. Mr Ambassador, I hope that during your mandate relations between the Holy See and the Slovak Republic will be positively strengthened. To this end, it will be very important, among other things, to conclude the negotiations on the bilateral agreements which will provide a precise juridical framework for relations between the Slovak State and the Catholic Church, permitting the latter to continue her mission of evangelization and social advancement with greater security and renewed commitment.

I wish you a tranquil and fruitful stay in Rome and I cordially bless you and the service you are preparing to render. I also impart my Blessing to your family, to your staff and to all the citizens of Slovakia, whom I entrust to the protection of their beloved and revered patroness, Our Lady of Sorrows.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n.42 p.4.*

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