



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR TO THE HOLY SEE****

Castel Gandolfo, 11 september 1999

Mr Ambassador,

I am particularly pleased to welcome Your Excellency on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters by which His Majesty Emperor Akihito accredits you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to the Holy See.

I was touched, Mr Ambassador, by the respectful words you have just addressed to me and by your good wishes for the 20th anniversary of my Pontificate. I thank you for expressing your Sovereign's wishes, and I would be grateful if you would reciprocate my fervent good wishes for him and the imperial family, for the members of the Government and for all the Japanese people. I remember the visit that your country's Prime Minister paid me at the beginning of last January, which is one expression of the strengthening of the cordial ties between the Apostolic See and Japan.

This year your country is celebrating the 450th anniversary of the arrival in your land of St Francis Xavier, patron of the missions and a great figure to whom the Japanese are particularly attached.

He is the symbol of a deep spiritual experience and a close bond with Christ, who urges his disciples to proclaim the Gospel and to put themselves at the service of their brethren on all the continents. From this viewpoint, one can say that this great saint, who is part of your history as well as that of his native country, has helped to build bridges and to create fraternal relations between the West and the East. St Francis Xavier's life and work also remind us of the importance of spiritual and religious freedom, which, while respecting the principles of civil society, are the indispensable conditions for building a nation, as well as for cooperation and friendship between peoples.

Throughout history, Christianity has always been concerned to unite and to bring together persons and peoples, tirelessly helping them to build a more just and fraternal society and to promote peace, which is indispensable for the integral growth of individuals and human communities. In this spirit we should acknowledge Japan's attitude of tolerance: the nation remains attached to its tradition of openness to different religions - this is a guarantee of respect for all individual and community freedoms - while taking care to protect people from movements that may hinder freedom and can seriously endanger its citizens, particularly the weakest.

We cannot forget that your country is one of the symbols of peace, as you have just emphasized, since the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are a message to all our contemporaries, inviting all the earth's peoples to learn the lessons of history and to work for peace with ever greater determination. Indeed, they remind our contemporaries of all the crimes committed during the Second World War against civilian populations, crimes and acts of true genocide which we thought were for ever in the past but are still being perpetrated in various parts of the world. In order not to forget the atrocities of the past, it is important to teach the younger generation the incomparable value of peace between individuals and peoples, because the culture of peace is contagious but is far from having spread everywhere in the world, as is demonstrated by persistent situations of conflict. We must constantly repeat that peace is the essential principle of common life in all societies.

Although few in number, Catholics are called to take an active role with all their compatriots in the public life of Japanese society and to participate in its development and transformation so that it will be increasingly at the service of the human person, who must be the focus of concern for all public leaders, especially in the political and economic spheres. Throughout her long tradition, the Church has been concerned for the common good and carries out her activity in your country, especially in the educational field, by taking care to impart a civic sense to the younger generation as well as the spiritual and moral values that are essential for their personal life and their role in society; by holding up an ideal to them, she helps young people to have hope in the future and to prepare themselves for assuming the tasks to which they will be called in the service of their country.

Without being practically involved in public life and the conduct of earthly affairs - which is the task of the laity - it is nevertheless the duty of Bishops and the clergy as a whole to offer their support to those involved and to decision-makers, especially by guiding them in their reflection on social issues and in the search for ever new ways to conduct affairs, so that they can perceive and enable their compatriots to perceive the anthropological and ethical foundations of actions and decisions concerning the governance of the *res publica*, as well as the need for national and international solidarity, to which you have just referred.

In this perspective, while your region is currently experiencing serious economic difficulties, Japan has an important role to play, so that the problems do not weigh inordinately upon the weakest

and most fragile countries; indeed, it is essential to mobilize everyone, to prevent more and more individuals and families from being relegated to situations of insecurity and poverty. I therefore invite all Japanese people to show ever greater solidarity to those affected by the crisis in their own country as well as throughout South-East Asia.

As you begin your mission as Japan's representative to the Apostolic See, I offer you my best wishes, hoping that you will carry out your task with particular dedication during the Jubilee Year. I can assure you that you will always receive a warm welcome and attentive understanding from my assistants.

At the end of our meeting, I ask the Most High to shower his blessings upon His Majesty Emperor Akihito and the imperial family, upon the Japanese people and upon those responsible for the country's destiny on the threshold of the third millennium, upon Your Excellency and your loved ones, as well as upon the embassy staff.

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