



The Holy See

JUBILEE PILGRIMAGE

OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO MOUNT SINAI *SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II*

AT THE ARRIVAL CEREMONY International Airport of Cairo, 24 February 2000

Mr President,

Your Holiness Pope Shenouda,

Your Beatitude Patriarch Stephanos,

Grand Sheikh Mohammed Sayed Tantawi,

Dear People of Egypt,

As-salámu 'aláikum – Peace be with you!

1. For many years I have been looking forward to celebrating the 2000th anniversary of the Birth of Jesus Christ by visiting and praying at the places specially linked to God's interventions in history. My Jubilee pilgrimage brings me today to Egypt. Thank you, Mr President, for making it possible for me to come here and to go to where God revealed his name to Moses and gave his Law as a sign of his great mercy and kindness towards his creatures. I greatly appreciate your kind words of welcome.

This is the land of a five thousand-year-old civilization known throughout the world for its monuments and for its knowledge of mathematics and astronomy. This is the land where different cultures met and mingled, making Egypt famous for its wisdom and learning.

2. In Christian times, the City of Alexandria – where the Church was established by the disciple of Peter and Paul, the Evangelist Mark – nurtured renowned ecclesiastical writers like Clement and Origen, and great Fathers of the Church such as Athanasius and Cyril. The fame of Saint Catherine of Alexandria lives on in Christian devotion and in the name of many churches in all parts of the world. Egypt, with Saints Anthony and Pachomius, was the birthplace of monasticism, which has played an essential part in preserving the spiritual and cultural traditions of the Church.

The advent of Islam brought splendours of art and learning which have had a determining influence on the Arab world and on Africa. The people of Egypt have for centuries pursued the

ideal of national unity. Differences of religion were never barriers, but a form of mutual enrichment in the service of the one national community. I well remember the words of Pope Shenouda III: “Egypt is not the native land in which we live, but the native land which lives in us”.

3. The unity and harmony of the nation are a precious value which all citizens should cherish, and which political and religious leaders must continually promote in justice and respect for the rights of all. Mr President, your own commitment to peace at home and throughout the Middle East is well known. You have been instrumental in advancing the peace process in the region. All reasonable men and women appreciate the efforts made so far, and hope that goodwill and justice will prevail, so that all the peoples of this unique area of the world will see their rights respected and their legitimate aspirations fulfilled.

My visit to Saint Catherine’s Monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai will be a moment of intense prayer for peace and for interreligious harmony. To do harm, to promote violence and conflict in the name of religion is a terrible contradiction and a great offence against God. But past and present history give us many examples of such a misuse of religion. We must all work to strengthen the growing commitment to interreligious dialogue, a great sign of hope for the peoples of the world.

As-salámu 'aláikum – Peace be with you!

This is my greeting to you all. This is the prayer I offer up for Egypt and all her people.

May the Most High God bless your land with harmony, peace and prosperity.