



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION
WHO PREPARED HIS VISIT
TO BANJA LUKA (BOSNIA) LAST 22 JUNE**

Thursday, 4 December 2003

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I welcome you with joy and cordially greet each one of you, gathered in Rome to exchange the Pastoral Visit I was able to make to Banja Luka last 22 June. With heartfelt gratitude for the warm reception given to me then, I welcome each of you.

First of all, I greet the Bishop of Banja Luka, Mons. Franjo Komarica, and I thank him for the kind words which, also as President of the Bishops' Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina, he addressed to me in the name of all present. Together with him, I fraternally greet the esteemed and dear Cardinal Vinko Puljic, Archbishop of Vrhbosna, together with the Auxiliary Bishop Pero Sudar and the dear and zealous Bishop of Mostar-Duvno and Apostolic Administrator of Trebinje-Mrkan, who was unable to participate in this gathering. My respectful thought then goes to the President of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr Dragan Covic, and to the other members of the Presidency, as well as to the Ministers present and to all of the civil Authorities of the Nation, whom I thank for the diligent effort made towards the success of my Pastoral Visit.

2. In Banja Luka I had the great joy to proclaim Blessed a young man native of that city, Ivan Merz. May his shining example of holiness encourage Catholic lay persons in their witness to the Gospel, the standard and fundamental direction for Christians of every epoch.

This young man, as the Bishops of your Country wrote, "truly has many things to say and to witness" (*Bishops' Pastoral Letter*) to every person of good will. The most impressive teaching is found perhaps within the pages of his *Diary*, dated 5 February 1918, when Europe was totally at

war and he was on the front line: "Never forget God! Always desire to be united with him!".

3. These words hold a particular meaning for your Country in its effort to overcome many sufferings, the result of an oppressive regime and a drawn-out war. You are able to overcome this difficult situation, thanks to the establishment of democratic institutions at the political and administrative level. More necessary, however, will be the cultivation of a genuine spiritual renewal that opens the way to forgiveness, reconciliation and reciprocal respect for the cultural and religious identity by everyone.

These are the ways which lead to the creation of a prosperous and peaceful, free and solid society; this is the road that enables the eagerly-anticipated return of refugees and exiles to their native lands in an atmosphere of security and complete freedom.

4. The challenge facing you is a big one: "Never forget God!". I assure you of the support of my prayers and want to encourage you to proceed with confidence.

May God's Blessing descend upon you and your dear Country.

Praised be Jesus and Mary!