



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TO THE HOLY SEE****

Thursday 15 May 2003

Your Excellency,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican as you present the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the Holy See. Though my visit to your country took place some years ago now, I well remember the warmth and hospitality with which I was received. I would ask you kindly to express my sincere best wishes to His Excellency President Richards, to the Prime Minister and the Government, and to all the people of your beloved country. Please convey to them my gratitude for their greetings and assure them of my prayers for the nation's peace and prosperity.

The Holy See's steadfast commitment to promoting the dignity of the human person stands at the heart of all her diplomatic activity. Without the fundamental recognition and protection of the incomparable worth of the human person, efforts to attain peaceful coexistence among peoples of differing ethnic groups and religious traditions are in vain. In this regard it gladdens me to note your country's appreciation of the urgent need for the entire human family – from individuals to countries, from regional organizations to international alliances – to give tangible and practical expression to what my predecessor, Blessed Pope John XXIII, identified as the four pillars of peace: truth, justice, love and freedom. The efficacy and indeed necessity of these pillars for peace stem directly from their being "four precise requirements of the human spirit" (*Message for the 2003 World Day of Peace*, 3). Building peace in our world thus finds its sure basis in respect for the inviolable dignity of every person.

In a multi-cultural and multi-religious society such as that found in your own country, the imperative of recognizing and protecting the intrinsic dignity and distinctiveness of every human being is keenly felt. Furthermore, the quest to achieve national unity through diversity and social

harmony through tolerance, when firmly anchored in a willingness to defend the values rooted in the very nature of the human person, becomes not just a matter of passive acceptance but a means of active cultural enrichment for all. Indeed when cultural and religious differences are treasured as gifts, they disclose the hand of God who creates every man and woman in his own image, and who alone bestows the fullness of unity upon the human family.

Authentic economic development, which always contains a moral aspect, is also of crucial importance to the well-being and peaceful progress of a nation. It is here that the demand for justice is satisfied (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 10). The right to meaningful work and an acceptable standard of living, the assurance of a fair distribution of goods and wealth, and the responsible use of natural resources all depend upon a concept of development which is not limited to merely satisfying material necessities. Instead, such a concept must also highlight the dignity of the human person – who is the proper subject of all development – and thereby enhance the common good of all humanity. While such a goal certainly demands the support of the entire international community, it is also the case that much can be achieved at the level of regional development. This requires that excessive nationalism be laid to rest so that the profound value of communal solidarity be permitted to find expression in local agreements conducive to regional economic and social cooperation.

Mr Ambassador, as you have remarked, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, like many people in our world, though remaining confident about the hope of tomorrow are nevertheless suffering from acute social problems. The assault on family life, which seems tragically to be a sign of our times, takes on many forms. One of the most pernicious of these is undoubtedly the trade and use of drugs, representing a grave threat to the social fabric. They fuel crime and violence, contribute to the desolation of family life and to the physical and emotional destruction of many individuals and communities, especially among the young (cf. *Ecclesia in America*, 24). The ensuing degradation of the person betrays the nature of life as gift and undermines the meaning of the fullness of life revealed to us by Jesus Christ. For these reasons I have stressed on many occasions that "here we are facing one of the most urgent challenges which many nations around the world need to address" (*ibid*).

For her part, in proclaiming the Gospel of life received from her Lord (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, 2) the Catholic Church ardently desires to promote among all peoples, and in a special way among the young, the culture of truth and love which leads to authentic freedom and happiness. To this end, both civic and religious institutions must work together to ensure that the sacred institution of marriage, with its concomitant of stable family life, is upheld and supported wholeheartedly. Any hope for renewal of society which does not adhere to God's plan for marriage and the family is destined to flounder (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 3), for it is within family life that the God-given dignity of every person is first realized and experienced. But when this dignity is affirmed through principles of equality and respect for the common good, and protected through the maintenance of law and order and by honest governance, society cannot fail to flourish. Motivated by love, the

Catholic Church in Trinidad and Tobago will thus continue to support marriage and family life and uphold it as the "most effective means for humanizing and personalizing society" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 43). It is to this Gospel-inspired vision of life that her schools, health-care facilities, and other works of charity attest.

Mr Ambassador, I am confident that your mission which you begin today will help to strengthen the bonds of understanding and cooperation between Trinidad and Tobago and the Holy See. As you take up your new responsibilities I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia are ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon you and your fellow citizens I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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