



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE CONGRESSMEN OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Monday, 18 January 1982

*Dear Congressmen,
dear friends from the United States,*

In my message for the World Day of Peace this year, I addressed my words explicitly “to the men and women who today bear responsibility for life in society”. Since you are among those belonging to this important category of people at the service of peace, I am very happy to speak to you personally this morning and to welcome you to the Vatican.

1. Peace is without doubt a gift of God. But because it is entrusted to us, peace is also linked with human justice, which in turn is fostered through sound structures of law and through the delicate and diligent activities of legislators. As Congressmen you are in a position to offer an eminent form of service to your fellow citizens. You are in a position to help build legal structures that reflect justice and thereby promote peace. Moreover, the structures that you build can be a lasting contribution.

2. The service that you perform can benefit not only your own country but also society in general.

The measures that you take in Congress affect the lives of millions of Americans. They likewise touch the well-being of people throughout the world; the enactments of your Congress can give fraternal support to whole sectors of mankind and can sustain the hope of entire peoples.

3. You are called upon to champion human dignity within your country and beyond its boundaries.

You are called to be courageous advocates of human rights – especially those inalienable rights proclaimed by your own Declaration of Independence: the right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. To defend and protect human life, to help all your brothers and sisters live as free people pursuing that true happiness willed for them by the Creator – this is

indeed a splendid mission.

4. Last Saturday I had occasion to mention to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See that present times are difficult. But I also added: "The forces for good are greater!". I believe that your role as Congressmen gives you immense opportunities to do good in many ways: as trusted and truthful servants of the public, as defenders of freedom, as proponents of justice, as supporters of life, as friends of the poor – and thus as real peace-makers promoting human rights.

All of this is in the best tradition of your land – in the American way of life. Again, as your Declaration of Independence states, it is in order to secure these rights that "Governments are instituted among men". Or, as a distinguished American, Thomas Jefferson – to whom I referred during my address on the Mall in Washington – once said: "The care of human life and happiness and not their destruction is the first and only legitimate object of good government".

Ladies and gentlemen, the challenge is great and can be deeply fulfilling. You are called to contribute effectively to the destiny of America and to the future of the world. May God sustain you in this important task of service in the true cause of human rights, of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness".

Thank you for your visit.

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