



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORLD TRAVEL CONGRESS
OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF TRAVEL AGENTS**

Thursday, 14 November 1985

Dear Friends,

1. I am happy to welcome you who are participating in the *World Travel Congress of the American Society of Travel Agents*. You come from more than a hundred different countries across the globe and in your assembly I see reflected the unity and diversity of the human family. I have learned that thirty-two years ago when the same Congress was held in Rome, my predecessor Pope Pius XII also met with the participants. And I am pleased to follow his example by welcoming you today to the Vatican.

Your presence here offers me the opportunity of reflecting on the important phenomenon of tourism. As a result of constantly improving means of transportation, tourism has become a prominent characteristic of our technological society. And the Catholic Church which carries out her mission in the midst of the world sees this as a sign of the times with *powerful potential for good*.

There are *many authentic human values* which are encouraged and enhanced by tourism, and I wish to speak of some of these today. Yet, as I begin, I cannot overlook certain negative factors also connected with this phenomenon. I refer to those practices which can demean the tourists themselves or serve to exploit the countries visited. What is important is that the basic dignity of every person be respected, both the dignity of the visitors and that of the people being visited.

2. In considering the positive developments that have taken place during the last several decades we can see in many cases how tourism has strengthened *unity and fraternal solidarity* between individuals and between nations. The world is becoming a global village in which people from

different continents are made to feel like next-door neighbors. Modern transportation has removed many of the obstacles formerly imposed by geographical distances. It has enabled people to appreciate each other better and to engage in fruitful dialogue and mutual exchange. In facilitating more authentic social relationships between individuals, tourism can help overcome many real prejudices, and foster new bonds of fraternity. In this sense tourism can be a real force for world peace.

Through *the recreation and leisure* made possible by travel, people are restored and renewed, body and spirit. They return home to family and work with a new perspective and enthusiasm for life. The Church also attaches importance to the phenomenon of tourism because of the *cultural enrichment* that it offers. This corresponds to the deep longings of the human heart and can counterbalance certain dehumanizing tendencies in our highly technological society. The spirit is uplifted and refreshed in the contemplation of what is beautiful, whether it is embodied in the wonders of creation or expressed in works of art. When tourism truly fosters this contemplation of beauty, it elevates and invigorates, and favours a dialogue with the Creator, for God is the source of all that is truly beautiful in nature as well as in the arts. Not only for Christians but for all who believe in God the contemplation of beauty is a way to inner harmony and joy.

3. The Church likewise appreciates the complex reality of tourism as a means of furthering certain *religious values*. A clear example of this is the common practice of making *a pilgrimage*, that is, a journey to a sacred place or sanctuary for a religious motive. This practice is not restricted to any one people or religion. The spiritual value of going on pilgrimage has long been present in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and it is found to penetrate all the aspects of the pilgrim's life.

The Christian message has always emphasized service of others. As travel agents and tour operators, you indeed are *people who serve*. You are so often in a position to offer counsel and assistance to others. You help those who routinely make business trips. You assist individuals and families during their vacations and holidays. Some of you are in a position to offer a helping hand to the aged and the handicapped. You may, at times, be able to give particular attention to young people, helping them to appreciate the wonderful opportunity of discovering different cultures and broadening their horizons. As you give assistance to travelers in their journeys, may you know that special joy that God grants to those who place themselves at the disposal of others. In this context I would like to express my gratitude for all that your colleagues throughout the world have done for me during my various apostolic journeys.

By way of conclusion I wish you to know that *I very much appreciate your efforts* to cultivate human understanding and cultural enrichment through tourism. As people of good will strive to eliminate injustice and discrimination and seek to transform the world into a civilization of love, the encounters engendered among peoples through travel are not only a condition for the realization of peace but *a positive contribution towards peace*. May your efforts always promote this goal. Please accept my cordial best wishes for the success of your endeavors and may the God of

peace be with you all.

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