



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO AMERICA

WELCOME CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

Mexico City's international airport

Friday, 22 January 1999

Mr President of the Republic,

Your Eminences and Brothers in the Episcopate,

Beloved Brothers and Sisters of Mexico,

1. Today I have arrived in Mexico as I did 20 years ago, and it is a great joy for me to return to this blessed land where Our Lady of Guadalupe is venerated as a beloved Mother. As I did then and on my two subsequent visits, I come as an apostle of Jesus Christ and the Successor of St Peter to strengthen my brothers and sisters in the faith and to proclaim the Gospel to all people. On this occasion, moreover, this capital city is to be the place of a privileged and exceptional meeting for an historic event: tomorrow morning in the Basilica of Guadalupe, together with the Bishops of the entire American continent, I will present the results of the Synod held in Rome more than a year ago.

At that time, the Bishops of America described the essential features of their future pastoral activity which, on the basis of the faith we share, we hope will fully respond to God's saving plan and to the dignity of the human being within the framework of just, reconciled societies that are open to technological progress in conformity with the necessary moral progress. This is the experience of the Bishops and faithful who express their Catholic faith in Spanish, English, Portuguese, French or one of the many languages belonging to the indigenous cultures which represent the roots of this continent of hope.

At the Nunciature this afternoon I will have the joy of signing the Apostolic Exhortation in which I have incorporated the ideas and suggestions expressed by the Bishops of America. Through the new evangelization the Church wishes to reveal her identity more clearly: to be closer to Christ and to his Word; to demonstrate that she is authentic and free from worldly influences; to be of greater service to the human person from a Gospel perspective; to be a leaven of the unity

and not the division of humanity, which is opening to new, broader and still emerging horizons.

2. I am pleased now to greet Mr Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, President of the United Mexican States, and I thank him for his kind words of welcome. In you, Mr President, I greet all the Mexican people, this noble and beloved people who work, pray and press on in search of an ever better future, on the vast plains of Sonora or Chihuahua, in the tropical forests of Veracruz or Chiapas, in the bustling industrial centres of Nuevo León or Coahuila, at the feet of the great volcanos rising from the peaceful valleys of Puebla and Mexico City, in the friendly seaports of the Atlantic and the Pacific. I also greet the millions of Mexicans who live and work outside their national borders. Since this is a journey with a continental flavour, I also greet everyone who in one way or another is following these events.

I affectionately greet my Brothers in the Episcopate, in particular, Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera, Archbishop of Mexico City and Primate of Mexico; the President and members of the Mexican Episcopal Conference, as well as the other Bishops who have come from different countries to take part in the events of this Pastoral Visit, thus renewing and strengthening the close bonds of communion and affection between all the particular Churches on the American continent, from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. In this greeting my heart also reaches out with great affection to the beloved priests, deacons, men and women religious, catechists and faithful to whom I am indebted in the Lord. May God grant that this visit, which begins today, will encourage everyone in their generous effort to proclaim Jesus Christ with renewed zeal in view of the new millennium now close at hand.

3. Since the time they welcomed me 20 years ago with open arms and filled with hope, the Mexican people have accompanied me on many of the paths I have taken. I have met Mexicans at the Wednesday General Audiences and at the great events which the Church has celebrated in Rome and elsewhere in America and throughout the world. The greeting with which they always welcomed me still echoes in my ears: Mexico ever faithful and ever present!

I come to a country where the Catholic faith served as a foundation for the intermingling which transformed the ancient ethnic and antagonistic plurality into a fraternal unity and destiny. Nor is it possible to understand Mexico without the faith brought from Spain to these lands by the first 12 Franciscans, and later strengthened by Dominicans, Jesuits, Augustinians and others who preached Christ's saving word. In addition to the work of evangelization which made Catholicism an integral and fundamental part of the nation's soul, the missionaries left deep cultural imprints and marvellous works of art which today are a legitimate cause of pride for all Mexicans and a rich expression of their civilization.

I come to a country whose history is traversed by three realities which, like rivers that are sometimes hidden and plentiful, converge at times and at others reveal their complementary differences, without ever merging completely: the ancient and rich sensitivity of the indigenous peoples loved by Juan de Zumárraga and Vasco de Quiroga, whom many of these peoples

continue to call fathers; Christianity, rooted in the Mexican soul; and modern rationality of the European kind, which wanted so much to exalt independence and freedom. I know that many far-sighted minds are working hard so that these currents of thought and culture can better combine their resources through dialogue, sociocultural development and the desire to build a better future.

I come to you, Mexicans of all social classes and conditions, and to you, my brothers and sisters of the American continent, to greet you in the name of Christ: the God who became man so that all human beings could hear his call to divine sonship in Christ. Together with my Brother Bishops of Mexico and all America, I come to kneel before the tilma of Bl. Juan Diego. I will ask Our Lady of Guadalupe, at the end of a prolific but tormented millennium, that the next millennium will be one in which secure ways of brotherhood and peace are opened in Mexico, America and the whole world. Brotherhood and peace, which can find in Jesus Christ a sure foundation and spacious paths of progress. With the peace of Christ, I wish Mexicans success in their quest for harmony, since they constitute a great nation which unites them all.

4. Since I already feel prostrate before the *Morenita* Virgin of Tepeyac, Queen of Mexico and Empress of America, from this moment I commend the destiny of this nation and of the whole continent to her motherly care. May the new century and the new millennium encourage a general rebirth under the gaze of Christ, our life and our hope, who always offers us the ways of brotherhood and of sound human fellowship. May Our Lady of Guadalupe help Mexico and America to walk together on these paths, safe and filled with light.