



The Holy See

ARRIVAL CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER*

Kyiv International Airport

Saturday, 23 June 2001

Mr President,

Distinguished Civil Authorities and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Venerable Brother Bishops,

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. I have long awaited this visit and have prayed fervently that it might take place. Finally, with deep joy, I have been able to kiss the beloved soil of Ukraine. I thank God for the gift which today he has given me.

History has recorded the names of *two Roman Pontiffs* who, in the distant past, came this far: Saint Clement I at the end of the first century and Saint Martin I in the mid-seventh. They were deported to the Crimea, where they died as martyrs. Their present successor, however, comes to you *in an atmosphere of festive welcome*. He is eager to make this pilgrimage to the renowned churches of Kyiv, the cradle of the Christian culture of the whole of Eastern Europe.

I come among you, dear citizens of Ukraine, as *a friend of your noble Nation*. I come as a brother in the faith to embrace all the Christians who, amid the severest of tribulations, have persevered in their fidelity to Christ.

I come in love, to express to all the sons and daughters of this Nation, to Ukrainians of every cultural and religious background, my esteem and my cordial friendship.

2. I greet you, Ukraine, *brave and determined witness of adherence to the values of faith*. How much you suffered in order to vindicate, in difficult times, the freedom to profess this faith!

I am reminded of the words of the Apostle Saint Andrew, who according to tradition said that he saw the glory of God shining brightly on the hills of Kyiv. And this is what happened, centuries later, with the Baptism of Prince Vladimir and his

people.

But the Apostle's vision does not concern only your past; its light shines also on the future of your country. With the eyes of my heart, in fact, I seem to see a new radiance spreading over this blessed land: the radiance that will spring from the renewed confirmation of the choice made in the distant year 988, when Christ was accepted by the Ukrainian Nation as "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (*Jn 14:6*).

3. If today I have the joy of being here among you, I owe it to the invitation made to me by you, President Leonid Kuchma, and by all of you, my venerable Brother Bishops of the two traditions, Eastern and Western. I am most grateful to you for this kind gesture, which has enabled me to set foot for the first time as the Successor of the Apostle Peter on the soil of this land.

My gratitude goes first of all to you, Mr President, for your warm welcome and for the courteous words which you have just addressed to me also in the name of all your fellow citizens. Through you I wish to greet the whole Ukrainian people. I congratulate them *on their re-won independence* and give thanks to God for the fact that *this took place without bloodshed*. A wish for the future rises up in my heart: that the Ukrainian Nation may continue on this road of peace, thanks to the harmonious contribution of the different ethnic, cultural and religious groups! Without peace, no shared and lasting prosperity is possible.

4. My thanks go now to you, my venerable Brother Bishops of the Greek Catholic Church and of the Latin Catholic Church. I have kept in my heart your repeated invitations to visit Ukraine, and I am happy that I am now able finally to do so. I am filled with joy and anticipation at the thought of the various opportunities which we shall have in the coming days to be *united in prayer to Christ*, our Lord. To the faithful of your communities go my affectionate greetings.

What an *immense burden of suffering* you have had to endure in years past! But now you are responding enthusiastically and re-organizing yourselves, seeking light and comfort from your glorious past. Your intention is to continue courageously in your resolve to spread the Gospel, the light of truth and love for every human being. Do not lose heart! This is an undertaking that honours you, and the Lord will certainly not fail to grant you the grace to bring it to completion.

5. As a pilgrim of peace and brotherhood, I am sure that I shall be welcomed with friendship also by those who, although they are not Catholics, have hearts open to dialogue and cooperation. I wish to assure them that *I have not come here with the intention of proselytizing*, but to bear witness to Christ together with all Christians of every Church and Ecclesial Community, and to invite all the sons and daughters of this noble Land to turn their eyes to him who gave his life for the salvation of the world.

In this spirit I extend a cordial greeting to the dear Brother Bishops, the monks and priests, and all the faithful of the Orthodox Church, who form the majority of the citizens in this Country. I recall with pleasure that down the course of history relations between the Church of Rome and the Church of Kyiv *have known periods of light*: as we remember these, we feel encouraged to hope for a future of ever greater understanding on the road to full communion.

Unfortunately, there have also been *sad times*, when the image of Christ's love has been obscured: bowing before our

one Lord, *let us recognize our faults*. As we ask forgiveness for the errors committed in both the distant and recent past, let us in turn offer forgiveness for the wrongs endured. The most fervent wish that rises from my heart is that the errors of times past will not be repeated in the future. May their memory not be a hindrance on the way to mutual knowledge, the source of brotherhood and cooperation.

The world is rapidly changing: what was unthinkable yesterday is within our reach today. Christ exhorts us all to renew in our hearts feelings of brotherly love. If we rely on love, it is possible — with God's help — to transform the world.

6. Finally, my greetings extend to all the other citizens of Ukraine. Notwithstanding the diversity of your religious and cultural backgrounds, beloved people of Ukraine, there is one element that unites you: you share the same history, and the hopes and disappointments which it has brought.

Down the centuries, the Ukrainian people has known *harsh and exhausting trials*. How can we fail to recall, remaining in the context of the century just ended, the scourge of the two World Wars, the recurring famines, the disastrous natural calamities — extremely sad events that in their wake left millions dead? In particular, under the oppression of totalitarian regimes such as Communism and Nazism, the people risked losing its national, cultural and religious identity; it saw the destruction of the intellectual elite, the custodians of the Nation's civil and religious heritage. Most recently, there was the radioactive accident at Chernobyl, with its tragic and pitiless consequences for the environment and the lives of so many human beings. But it was precisely at that moment that the definitive change for the better began. That apocalyptic event, which led your country to repudiate nuclear weapons, also brought your citizens to a vigorous re-awakening, inspiring them to set out on the road to a brave renewal.

It is difficult to explain as the result of merely human dynamics the epoch-making changes of the last two decades. But whatever the interpretation given, it is certain that from these experiences *a new hope has been born*. It is important not to disappoint the expectations which now fill the hearts of so many, especially among the young. With the contribution of everyone it is now urgently necessary to promote in the cities and villages of Ukraine the blossoming of a new, authentic humanism. This is the dream that your great poet Taras Shevchenko expressed in the famous verse: ". . . *enemies will be no more, but there will be the child, there will be the mother, there will be people on the earth!*".

7. I embrace you all, beloved Ukrainians, from Donetsk to Lviv, from Kharkiv to Odessa and to Simferopol! In the very name Ukraine there is a reminder of the greatness of your Country which, with its history, bears witness to its unique vocation as the frontier and gate between East and West. Down the centuries this country has been the privileged crossroads of different cultures, the meeting place of the spiritual treasures of East and West.

Ukraine *has a clearly European vocation*, emphasized also by the Christian roots of your culture. My hope is that these roots will *strengthen your national unity*, bringing the life-blood of authentic and shared values to the reforms now under way. May this land continue in its noble mission, with the pride expressed by the poet just quoted when he wrote: "*Nowhere in the world is there another Ukraine, nowhere is there another Dnieper*". You who live in this Land, do not forget this!

These are the thoughts that fill my heart as I take my first steps on this visit, eagerly awaited and today happily begun.

God bless you, dear people of Ukraine, and may he always protect your beloved Homeland!

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