



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC VOYAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO CROATIA

WELCOME CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

*International Airport Adrija Riviera Kvarner of Rijeka/Krk
Thursday, 5 June 2003*

*Mr President,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Distinguished Authorities,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. With great joy I set foot *for the third time* on the beloved land of Croatia. I thank Almighty God for having allowed me to come back among you on this, *my hundredth Pastoral Visit*.

I offer respectful greetings to you, Mr President, and to the other civil and military Authorities present. I deeply appreciate the gracious sentiments you have expressed in the name of those present and of all your fellow-citizens.

I embrace with affection the whole Catholic community in Croatia, and in a particular way my Brother Bishops. I offer a special greeting to Bishop Valter Zupan and to the priests, religious and laity of the Diocese of Krk, in whose territory this airport is located. I also greet the members of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and the followers of Judaism and Islam. I am pleased that on this occasion too we can join in testifying to our common responsibility for the building up of society in justice and mutual respect.

2. I have come among you in order to fulfil *my mission as the Successor of Peter* and to bring to all those living in this country *greetings of peace and a heartfelt prayer for peace*. In visiting the Dioceses of *Dubrovnik, Djakovo-Srijem, Rijeka and Zadar* I will be able to honour the *ancient Christian roots* of this land steeped in the blood of countless martyrs. I think of the martyrs of the first three centuries – and in particular of the *Martyrs of Sirmium* and of *Roman Dalmatia* as a whole – and I think of those of successive centuries, up to the last century and the heroic figure of Blessed *Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac*.

I will also have the joy of beatifying *Sister Marija Propetoga Isusa Petković*, who will be joined in a few weeks by the young *Ivan Merz*. The memory of these intrepid witnesses to the faith makes me reflect with deep emotion and gratitude on the *Church which gave them birth* and on those difficult times in which she jealously preserved her fidelity to the Gospel.

3. The Island of Krk has a *rich Glagolitic heritage* which has developed in the liturgical usage and in the daily experience of the Croatian people. *Christianity greatly contributed to Croatia's development* in the past. It can also continue to make an effective contribution to Croatia's present and its future. For there are values – like the dignity of the human person, moral and intellectual integrity, religious freedom, the defence of the family, openness to and respect for life, solidarity, subsidiarity and participation, respect for minorities – which are inscribed in the nature of every human being, but which Christianity had the merit of clearly identifying and proclaiming. It is on these values that *the stability and true greatness of a nation* is based.

Croatia has recently asked to become an *integral part*, also from the political and economic point of view, of the *great family of the European peoples*. I can only express my hope that this aspiration will be happily realized: the rich tradition of Croatia will surely contribute to strengthening the Union as an administrative and territorial unit, and also as a cultural and spiritual reality.

4. This country, like several neighbouring countries, still *bears painful signs of a recent past*. may those who exercise civil and religious authority never tire of trying to heal the wounds caused by a cruel war and of rectifying the consequences of a totalitarian system that for all too long attempted to impose an ideology opposed to man and his dignity.

For almost thirteen years Croatia has trod the path of liberty and democracy. As it looks to the future with confidence and hope, it now needs to consolidate, with the responsible and generous contribution of everyone, a social stability that will further promote steady employment, public assistance, an education system open to all young people and freedom from all forms of poverty and inequality, in a climate of cordial relations with neighbouring countries.

Upon these prospects I invoke the intercession of Saint Joseph, Patron of Croatia, and that of the Virgin Mary, *Advocate of Croatia, Most Faithful Mother*.

May God bless this land and its people!

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