



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN XXIII EXTRAORDINARY DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS*

Friday, 12 October 1962

Your Highnesses, Excellencies and Gentlemen.

Your most welcome presence here this morning renews the emotion We felt yesterday in St. Peter's during the solemn opening of the Ecumenical Council, in which each of you took part as the representative of your own government. First of all We should like to say how grateful We are for your participation, which, by reason of its imposing nature, has contributed to the greatness of the occasion and to the effect it has had all over the world on men of good will.

We on Our part have wished to respond to this exceptional meeting by taking an exceptional step, by receiving you in the Sistine Chapel which is normally reserved for liturgical ceremonies and in which, as you know, the cardinals meet for the election of a new pope.

You will understand therefore that it is not without deep emotion that We address you in the very place where, nearly four years ago, Divine Providence in its mysterious designs decreed the elevation to the supreme pontificate of the humble Patriarch of Venice, who had spent the greater part of his life in the direct service of the Holy See in the East and the West. And now, four years later, the same Divine Providence gives Us the joy of opening the Ecumenical Council and of seeing, in your own illustrious persons, the great majority of the earth's peoples associated with this event, which has already roused worldwide interest in the Catholic Church.

This will help you to realize the place that this morning's special and solemn meeting has in the ceremonies of the Council. It is a clear indication that the Council, in addition to its religious significance, has also a social aspect which concerns the life of peoples. Your presence here very plainly shows that.

It is clearly evident that a Council is concerned primarily with the Catholic Church. Its purpose is to show the Church's vigor and to emphasize its spiritual mission. It also aims to adapt its methods so that the Gospel teaching may be worthily lived and more readily heeded by the people. Moreover, it endeavors to prepare the way for the coming together of so many brethren, for it is, as We said on January 25, 1959, «a renewed appeal to the faithful of the separated communities to follow Us amicably in this quest for unity and for grace, to which so many souls aspire from all corners of the earth». (*Discorsi*, Messaggi, I, 133).

Finally, the Council wishes to show the world how to put into practice the teaching of the divine Founder, the Prince of Peace. Whoever conforms his life to this teaching helps to establish peace and to foster true prosperity.

Among men who would wish to recognize only the effects of physical force, the duty of the Church would be to reveal the full consequence and efficacy of the moral force of Christianity, which is a message entirely of truth, of justice and of charity.

Such are the foundations on which the Pope must Tabor to establish a true peace; a peace directed toward the elevation of nations through respect for the human person and toward the procuring of a just freedom of religion and worship; a peace which nourishes harmony between nations – and there is no reason why this should not exist – even if it calls for some sacrifice on their part.

The natural consequences will be love for one another, brotherhood, and the end of strife between men of different races and different mentalities. Thus aid could be hastened «without thought of domination» (*Mater et Magistra* n. 184) to the developing nations, so urgently in need and searching for their true well-being.

Such is the great peace which all men await and for which they have suffered so much; it is time that decisive steps be taken.

It is this very peace which the Church labors to establish: by prayer, by the deep respect she has for the unfortunate, the sick, the aged, and by the spreading of her doctrine which is the doctrine of brotherly love; for men are Brothers and – We say it from a full heart – all sons of the same Father. The Council will certainly help to prepare this new climate and to remove all conflict, particularly war, that scourge of nations, which today would be pointing toward the destruction of humanity.

Your Highnesses, Excellencies and dear Gentlemen, there is here before us in the Sistine Chapel Michelangelo's vast masterpiece of the Last Judgment – the seriousness of which gives cause for thought and reflection. We must indeed render an account to God: We, and all the heads of state who bear responsibility for the fate of nations.

Let all of these recall that one day they will have to account for their actions to God their Creator, who will also be their Supreme Judge. In all conscience let them give ear to the anguished cry of «peace, peace,» which rises up to heaven from every part of the world, from innocent children and those grown old, from individuals and from communities. May this thought of the reckoning that they are to face spur them to omit no effort toward achieving this blessing, which for the human family is a blessing greater than any other.

Let them continue to meet each other in discussions and to reach just and generous agreements that they faithfully observe. Let them be ready to make the sacrifices necessary to save the world's peace, Nations will then be able to work in an atmosphere of serenity. All the discoveries of science will assist progress and help to make life on this earth – already marked by so many other inevitable sufferings – ever more pleasant.

The Council which was opened yesterday in your presence showed forth vividly the Church's universality. This imposing assembly «of every people and tongue and nation», by proclaiming the good news of salvation to the world, which for the past 100 years has seen all manner of turmoil, will undoubtedly bring God's enlightening answer to the agonizing problems of our day and will aid in that way the true progress of individuals and of whole nations.

There in full, your Highnesses, Excellencies and dear Gentlemen, is the dearest desire of Our heart. With great affection We call down on you and on all the nations of which you are the illustrious representatives the fullness of God's blessing. Indeed, as spoken by the psalmist

«Deus misereatur nostri, et benedicat nobis;

serenum praebeat nobis vultum suum,

Ut cognoscant in terra viam eius,

in omnibus gentibus salutem eius.

Celebrent Te populi, Deus, celebrent te populi omnes.

Laetentur et exsultent nationes, quod regis populos cum aequitate, et nationes in terra gubernas.

Celebrent te populi, Deus, celebrent te populi omnes.»

«May God have mercy on us and bless us ;/may he make his face to shine upon us,/That they may know his way upon earth,/his salvation among all the nations./May the peoples praise thee, O God,/may all the peoples praise thee./May the nations be glad and rejoice,/for thou judgest the peoples with rightness,/and thou rulest the nations upon earth./May the peoples praise thee, O God,/may all the peoples praise thee» (Ps. 67, 1-6).

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