



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr VÍCTOR GRIMALDI CÉSPEDES
AMBASSADOR OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC TO THE HOLY SEE**

Friday, 3 April 2009

Mr Ambassador,

I receive you with great joy, Your Excellency, on this solemn occasion when you are presenting the Letters of Credence accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Dominican Republic to the Holy See. I am grateful for the respectful words you have addressed to me and for the kind greeting on behalf of Mr Leonel Antonio Fernández Reyna, President of this noble nation. Please be so kind as to assure him that in my prayers to the Lord I remember his Government and the beloved Dominican people, so close to the Pope's heart.

Your Excellency, you come as Representative of a country with deep Catholic roots whose very name, as you have just pointed out, recalls the majority of its peoples' adherence to the Christian message with reference to Santo Domingo de Guzmán (St Dominic), the celebrated preacher of the word of God. I express the hope that your nation's cordial diplomatic relations with the Apostolic See may become even closer in the future.

As you also recalled, Your Excellency, the Dominican Catholic community is preparing to commemorate the fifth centenary of the Archdiocese of Santo Domingo, established on 8 August 1511. This event, together with the continental mission desired by the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences, celebrated at Aparecida, continues to be a reason for renewed missionary and evangelizing dynamism that will encourage the human advancement of all the members of society.

The Church, which can never be confused with the political community, joins the State in promoting the dignity of the person in the quest for the common good of society (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 76). In this context their reciprocal self-determination and healthy cooperation form part of

the diplomatic initiatives which, in the words of my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, are "a labour of serving the great cause of peace, rapprochement and cooperation among peoples and a fruitful exchange for building more human and just relations" (*Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Dominican Republic*, 11 October 1992, n. 1. *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 14 October 1992, p. 5). For this reason, the Holy See holds in high esteem the work you are beginning today, Your Excellency. Over time your country has built up a rich cultural patrimony, deeply impressed upon the soul of the people, in which important traditions and customs stand out. Many of them originate in and are nourished by Catholic teaching, which encourages in those who profess it a longing for freedom and a critical conscience, responsibility and solidarity.

More than 500 years ago Holy Mass was celebrated on the American continent for the first time on the territory which today is the Dominican Republic. Since then, and thanks to a generous and self-sacrificing labour of evangelization, faith in Jesus Christ grew ever more vigorous and active so that missionaries set out from the Island of La Hispaniola, charged with proclaiming the Good News of salvation on the continent. From that first seed the Church in Latin America subsequently developed and became a leafy tree, which, with the passing of the years, has borne abundant fruits of holiness, culture and prosperity for all the members of society.

In this regard it is right to recognize the contribution of the Church, through her institutions, for the benefit of your country's progress, especially in the educational sector, with the various universities, technical training centres and parish institutes and schools; and in the sector of social assistance, focussed on the numerous immigrants, refugees, disabled, the sick and the elderly, orphans and the needy. In this regard I am pleased to stress the practical collaboration that exists between the local Catholic bodies and the State institutions for development programmes which, in view of the common good of society, always seek to favour the neediest and give an impetus to authentic moral and spiritual values.

Moreover it is supremely important that those noble principles which have characterized the rich history of Santo Domingo since the foundation of your country be implanted and spread by means of the significant political and social exchanges in which the Dominican Republic has recently been involved. I am referring first of all to the defence and dissemination of such basic human values as the recognition and safeguard of the dignity of the person, respect for human life from the moment of conception until its natural end, and the defence of the family institution based on marriage between a man and a woman, since these are irreplaceable and indispensable elements of the social fabric.

In recent times, thanks to the work of your country's various institutions, considerable progress has been achieved on both the social and the economic level, which promise hope in a brighter and peaceful future. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go to assure Dominicans of a dignified life and to remove the stains of poverty, drug trafficking, marginalization and violence. Therefore, all

that aims to reinforce the institutions is fundamental to the well-being of society which is supported by pillars such as the practice of honesty and transparency, juridical autonomy, the care of and respect for the environment, and the implementation of social services, social assistance, health-care and education for the entire population. These steps must be accompanied by a strong determination to eradicate once and for all corruption, the cause of so much suffering, especially to the poorest and most defenceless of society. In establishing an atmosphere of real harmony and the search for effective and permanent responses and solutions to the most acute problems, the Dominican Authorities will always find the Church willing to lend a hand to build a freer, more peaceful, just and brotherly civilization.

Mr Ambassador, before concluding our meeting, I would like to renew to you my spiritual closeness together with my fervent good wishes that the important task which has been entrusted to you may be of benefit to your nation. Please express this hope to the President and to the Government of the Dominican Republic. Your Excellency, you, your family and the personnel of this diplomatic mission will always be able to count on the esteem, good will and support of this Apostolic See in carrying out your lofty duty, which I hope will bear an abundance of fruit. I pray the Lord through the intercession of Our Lady of Altagracia and St Dominic de Guzmán that he may fill with heavenly gifts all the sons and daughters of this beloved country to whom, I gladly impart the Apostolic Blessing.

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