



The Holy See

***DISCURSO DEL SANTO PADRE JUAN PABLO II
AL SEÑOR LIONEL RUDOLPH STEMPEL,
NUEVO EMBAJADOR DE PANAMÁ ANTE LA SANTA SEDE****

Jueves 13 de diciembre de 1990

Mister Ambassador,

It gives me great satisfaction to accept the Letters of Credence which you are now presenting and which accredit you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Panama to the Holy See.

I thank you very much for your kind words, and, in particular, for the respectful greeting which the President of the Republic and his Government wished to send me through you. I ask you to please pass on my greetings along with my best wishes for peace and for their welfare.

Mister Ambassador, in your words you wished to stress not only the good relations which exist between the Holy See and the Republic of Panama, as well as the Christian sentiments which inspire the Christian faithful of your noble country, for whom I have deep affection and sincere goodwill.

You alluded also to the pastoral visit I made to your country in March 1983. That was a happy occasion which offered me the chance to experience once again the attachment and the closeness which the Panamanians profess for the Successor of Peter, while showing as well their deep religious feeling which arises from their hearts in a cry for peace and justice.

The memory which I will always affectionately keep of those dear meetings became a prayer during those sad events which shook the social and political life of Panama last December, and which constituted a challenge to the generosity, solidarity and initiative of all Panamanians.

During those crucial days, as you wished to mention, the Church with her bishops in the forefront did not relax her involvement in the works of justice and mercy, in defence of human rights and of civil freedoms. That, along with her support for democracy and non-violence, not only maintained the hope and the courage of the citizens, but also set the basis for the process of social reconstruction. The Church as the defender of the truth about the human person cannot remain indifferent to events or circumstances which, on an individual or collective level, threaten human dignity or human rights.

We know that the difficult period has not ended. There is no lack of internal or external misunderstandings; there are not sufficient resources to meet the numerous needs in the areas of housing, health, education, and employment; not everyone stands ready to put aside personal or party interests. Therefore we want to appeal to the deep Christian faith which 500 years ago took root in your country's soil through the maternal assistance of St Mary La Antigua.

The task which today faces leaders in Panama's political, social, and economic life is arduous and not without obstacles. Basically it is a question of setting the foundations for a more just society: a society in which the fundamental rights of the person are safeguarded; one in which a spirit of participation is fostered by going beyond party or class interests; one in which the ethical imperative will be the obligatory reference point for all Panamanians, where a more equitable distribution of riches is achieved; where sacrifices are shared by all and not only by the most defenceless, where all apply themselves to the noble service of the country, thus fulfilling your human and Christian vocation.

The peace and harmony which all Panamanians are striving to establish must have its roots firmly planted in human dignity and in inalienable human rights. Real peace cannot exist if there is not a serious and decisive commitment to achieve social justice; peace and justice cannot be separated.

In this task, people invested with public authority have a primary role. As I wrote in the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, «...the fundamental duty of power is solicitude for the common good of society... Precisely in the name of these premises of the objective ethical order the rights of power can be understood only on the basis of respect for the objective and inviolable rights of man.... The lack of this leads to the dissolution of society, opposition by citizens to authority, or a situation of oppression, intimidation, violence, and terrorism, of which many examples have been provided by the totalitarianisms of this century» (n. 17).

In order for Panama to remain faithful to her Christian roots she needs to recapture, revivify and protect the moral and spiritual values which have shaped the history of your people as a nation. The deep values of respect for life and for the human person; values such as hard work, honesty and solidarity; values like the capacity for dialogue and shared decision-making on all levels. That will be the best guarantee of a better unity within society among the Panamanians and a firmer

commitment to the active search for the common good.

These considerations, Mister Ambassador, are an expression of my love and concern as Pastor for the dear sons and daughters of your country and a sign of the hope which the Church places in a more just and promising future for all of them.

Before ending this meeting, I wish to assure you of my esteem, along with my best wishes that the noble mission which has been given to you will have a good outcome. I pray Almighty God to assist you with His gifts, as well as your family and collaborators, the officials of your noble country and the most beloved Panamanian people who are always so close to the Pope's heart.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n.52 p.16, 17.*

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