



The Holy See

***DISCURSO DEL SANTO PADRE JUAN PABLO II
A LA SEÑORA MARÍA TERESA VIGGIANO DE OBARRIO,
NUEVA EMBAJADORA DE PANAMÁ ANTE LA SANTA SEDE****

Sábado 21 de octubre de 1995

Madam Ambassador,

1. I welcome you on this solemn occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Panama to the Holy See, and I sincerely thank you for your friendly words.

I first wish to return the respectful greeting that Dr. Ernest Pérez Balladares, President of the Republic, wished to convey to me through you. Please be good enough to express my best wishes for peace and prosperity to him.

2. You come to represent a nation which has many ties with the Catholic Church and with this Apostolic See. It is a tribute to Panama that at the beginning of the American continent's evangelization, Leo X established the Diocese of Santa Maria La Antigua, transferred in 1524 to Panama Viejo and subsequently to the present-day Panama City. It was the first episcopal see on the American mainland. Today the Church in this country, faithful to the demands of the Gospel and with due respect for legitimate pluralism, reaffirms her vocation of service to the great causes of man, as a citizen and child of God. May Christian principles inspire sound hope and new energy in order to give renewed impetus to a society where hard work, honesty and a spirit of involvement prevails at all levels.

I would again like to express to you Madam Ambassador, the determination of the Church in Panama, within the scope of her religious and moral mission, to work with the authorities and the various public institutions in fostering the loftiest values and the nation's spiritual and material prosperity. For their part, the Bishops, priests and religious communities will tirelessly fulfil their missionary, charitable and educational tasks.

3. In your address you mentioned the intention of the Panamanian authorities to lay firm foundations that will enable you to establish an increasingly just and participatory social order, committing themselves to reinforcing public institutions for the sake of greater honesty and transparency in the management of available resources. I hope that in this democratic process the basic values of the individual and of society will be preserved and enhanced. In this regard, I am pleased to recall what I said when I had the opportunity to visit your country in 1983: »In the seat of your highest national institution there are five bronze statues which represent the qualities which must accompany every child of this land: labour, perseverance, duty justice and law. May these fundamental values of the individual and of society be enlivened by spiritual richness, and above all by a Christian faith which inspires the common life of each of you and leads towards ever higher goals» (Departure speech, Tocumen Airport, 5 March 1983, L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 5 April 1983, p. 2).

4. In many parts of the world today we are witnessing a crisis of values affecting institutions such as the family and large sectors of the population, such as youth. In this regard, it is urgent for Panamanians to become more aware of their own responsibilities; and in the presence of God and their civic duties, they should strive to build a more just, fraternal and welcoming society.

I am pleased to point out that during the recently celebrated Year of the Family, after lengthy expectations, your country's Government promulgated the "Family Code, which went into effect last January. It was the fruit of the work and commitment of all the nation's vital forces, conscious that family problems continue to be a cause for «very serious concern», as the Bishops pointed out in their Pastoral letter "Nueva evangelicacion y sociedad panamena"

This Code, largely inspired by the Christian spirit, recognizes the rights and duties of each family member, as well as the State's responsibilities in the development of social policies aimed at effectively protecting and fostering the family institution. May this be one of this year's fruits! As I wrote in the Letter to Families: "No human society can run the risk of permissiveness in fundamental issues regarding the nature of marriage and the family! Such moral permissiveness cannot fail to damage the authentic requirements of peace and communion among people. It is thus quite understandable why the Church vigorously defends the identity of the family and encourages responsible individuals and institutions, especially political leaders and international organizations not to yield to the temptation of a superficial and false modernity" (n. 17).

5. You also referred to the fact that this year is marked by a special attention to the theme of women, which I have echoed in many of my discourses. The life and witness of great women in the Church, who down the centuries have been pioneers in society as mothers, workers and leaders in social and political life, in the healing professions and as teachers, makes an effective contribution to continuing our reflection and efforts to achieve proper respect for the dignity and inalienable rights of women. With all the means at its disposal, the Holy See and the other institutions of the Catholic Church will continue to work together, for a renewed commitment of all

to the good of the world's women" (Address to the Holy See's Delegation to the Beijing Conference, 29 August 1995, L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 30 August 1995, p. 1).

6. Madame Ambassador, before concluding this meeting, I would like to express my best wishes that your mission, which begins today, will be fruitful and successful. I ask you once again to convey my sentiments and hopes to your country's authorities, as I invoke God's blessing upon you, upon your distinguished family and staff, and especially upon all the beloved children of the noble Panamanian nation.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n. 45 p.4.*

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