



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF PILGRIMS FROM BELARUS
LED BY CARDINAL SWIATEK***

Saturday, 17 October 1998

1. Dear pilgrims of Belarus, I greet you with great joy and affection. I greet in particular Cardinal Kazimierz Swiatek, Metropolitan Archbishop of Minsk-Mohilev and Administrator of Pinsk, and I thank him for his words. The Cardinal is very dear to me and therefore I am pleased to be able to welcome him at this meeting. I greet the Bishop of Grodno, together with his Auxiliary Bishop, the representatives of the clergy, the religious congregations and the faithful of the Church of Belarus. I thank you for your presence and the prayers offered for the intentions of my service to the universal Church. God reward you!

2. Most of you have come to the Eternal City for the first time. This is certainly an historic pilgrimage, for you have come from a country that has regained its independence; in it the Church can now freely carry out her evangelizing mission. This has happened as a result of the historical events that occurred in Central and Eastern Europe during the years 1989-1990. How many of you still carry in your hearts the painful memories and wounds of those tragic experiences and the injustices suffered in the ruthless forced deportations to distant unknown lands or to concentration camps! How many of your loved ones never returned home. How many are still suffering today because of the separation and death of those so dear to them. I wish to mention also the persecutions suffered at the time by the Catholic Church. Who can count all the suffering of the lay faithful, the priests, the men and women religious in Belarus? I speak of it today because I carry deep in my heart all that you were forced to suffer in the terrible years of the Second World War and in the immediate post-war period. In this way I would also like to pay homage to those who maintained their dignity in those inhuman conditions, often giving a heroic witness of love to God and to the Church. At this moment I would like to acknowledge His Eminence, whose life, marked by suffering and humiliation, in some way reflects the destiny of whole families and individuals.

3. You have come to the tombs of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul to give thanks to God for supporting you with his strength in the time of trial and oppression. You have thanked God for the gift of faith and for the courage with which you defended your Christian tradition. You also came here to seek strength for the road that lies ahead. It is not enough to possess freedom; it must be constantly achieved and moulded. Good or bad use can be made of it, by putting it at the service of an authentic good or else of an apparent one. Today the world is pervaded by a distorted concept of freedom. There are many who proclaim a false freedom. It is important that everyone realizes this. We must pray to God that he will increase the good that was accomplished in your land and continues to be accomplished, so that your hearts may not lack strength, generosity and hope.

4. Fix your gaze on Christ, “be rooted and built up in him and established in the faith” (Col 2:7). He is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6) for every person, for entire societies and nations. Build the future of your families and your State on Christ. He alone can grant the light and strength to meet every challenge your society is facing. On the way to the third millennium, may you be accompanied by the Holy Mother of God and may she help you preserve your great, precious heritage of faith.

I take this occasion to extend a cordial greeting to all the citizens of Belarus. I wish your country every good thing and a beneficial spiritual and material development. May everyone in your country be happy. Build your present and your future together.

I receive many letters from you inviting me to visit Belarus. Perhaps divine Providence will permit me to accept your invitation. Let us hope so. We must pray fervently for this.

I sincerely bless all of you present here, and also your families and loved ones.

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