



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE PILGRIMS FROM LITHUANIA

Saturday, 4 March 2000

*Dear Brothers and Sisters of Lithuania!*1. Welcome to "Peter's house", the goal of your Jubilee pilgrimage! Almost every week at the General Audiences I have the opportunity to greet groups of faithful from Lithuania. Today there are many of you here representing the entire nation. I greet Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevicius, President of the Episcopal Conference, and thank him for his warm words on behalf of all. I also greet the Archbishop of Vilnius and the other Bishops present, with a cordial wish for Cardinal Vincentas Sladkevicius, who is at home due to poor health. I also welcome the priests, men and women religious and all of you. My thoughts naturally turn to my Pastoral Visit to your beloved country in September 1993, as well as to the sixth centenary of its "baptism" in 1987, solemnly celebrated in the Vatican Basilica in the presence of many Bishops from all over Europe. Lithuania was the last of the Baltic countries to become Christian, and the only one that remained faithful to the Catholic Church during the period of the Lutheran Reformation. Let us thank God for the Lithuanian people's fidelity to the Church and to the Successor of Peter, and for the witness of faith borne by so many Bishops, priests, religious and lay people, in many cases to the point of martyrdom, particularly in the tragic 50 years of communist occupation and persecution.

2. Today, having regained its civil and religious freedom, Lithuania has rediscovered its place in the European family. Freedom entails responsibility: your nation, dear Lithuanians, with its cultural heritage strengthened by the suffering endured in heroic fidelity to the Christian vocation, is called to contribute to the spiritual renewal of Europe and to reconciliation between peoples. St Casimir, your patron, whose feast day is celebrated today, was a great worker for unity in the name of Christ and the Gospel. May his example enlighten and guide you. May the witness of the past be an encouragement for a new evangelizing effort. At the dawn of the third millennium, Christians hear the Apostle Paul's words echo in their hearts with new force: "*Caritas Christi urget nos - the love of Christ impels us*" (2 Cor 5: 14). Contemporary man, in fact, has greater need than ever for the Gospel if he is to walk in the ways of truth, freedom, justice and peace. He needs it especially to know God and himself, and to nurture his own sense of dignity and respect for the value of life, redeemed by Christ's sacrifice.3. I deeply hope that this Jubilee pilgrimage to Rome will open your communities even more to the universal dimension of the Church. May the visit to the memorials of the apostles and martyrs, the meeting with Peter's Successor, the prayer offered to God with so many of the faithful from all the continents,

spur you, dear friends, to love and serve the Church. Strive to deepen your knowledge of the Second Vatican Council, to carry out its teachings in the life of the Church and society, starting with your families and parishes. May fraternal union, mercy and forgiveness, love for little ones and the poor, and generous, disinterested service be your distinguishing mark and an eloquent proof that you are in Christ. May Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and for ever, accompany you and guide your steps. Christ is with you. May this consoling certainty never leave you. Be courageous messengers and joyful witnesses of his living presence in the world! The Pope prays for you and blesses you all with great affection. ©

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