



The Holy See

PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO LOURDES ON THE OCCASION OF 150TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE PROMULGATION OF THE DOGMA
OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FRANCE***

Tarbes, 14 August 2004

*Mr President,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen!*

1. I thank the Lord for allowing me to return once again to this beloved land of France and to greet all of you with a heartfelt message of grace and peace. The purpose of my visit today is to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

With great emotion I wish to join the millions of pilgrims who come to Lourdes each year from every part of the world, in order to entrust to the Mother of the Lord the intentions which they bear in their hearts and to ask for her help and intercession.

2. As I make my way to that holy place, I wish first to extend my cordial greetings to you, Mr President, and, through you, to all the sons and daughters of this noble country, which is presently commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the "landing in Provence". May these celebrations contribute to building harmony between peoples and foster a renewed commitment to the pursuit of peace on the part of all.

I joyfully recall my previous visits to France and gladly take this opportunity to pay homage to the great patrimony of culture and faith which have marked her history. I cannot fail to mention the great Saints who came from this land, the outstanding masters of Christian thought, the schools of spirituality and the many missionaries who left their homeland in order to carry throughout the world the message of Christ the Lord. And I look with confidence to the Christian community of today, which generously takes up the call to enrich our own times with the wisdom and hope that come from the Gospel.

3. With respect for the responsibilities and competences of all, the Catholic Church desires to offer society *a specific contribution* towards the building of a world in which the great ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity can form the basis of social life, in the tireless pursuit and promotion of the common good.

I entrust these prayerful good wishes to the intercession of the young Bernadette Soubirous, a humble child of the Bigorre country, and through the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary I invoke upon this country God's choicest blessings, as a pledge of prosperity and peace, now and in the future.