



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr CARLOS LUIS CUSTER
AMBASSADOR OF ARGENTINA TO THE HOLY SEE****

Saturday, 28 February 2004

Mr Ambassador, I am pleased to receive you at the presentation of the Letters of Credence accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Argentina to the Holy See. The occasion also affords me the opportunity to express my cordial welcome to you and to wish you the very best in discharging the highly responsible mission that your Government has entrusted to you. I am grateful for your kind words on behalf of H.E. Mr Néstor Kirchner, President of the Country, and of his Government, expressing their determination to further relations both with this Apostolic See and with the local Church in view of the many far-reaching goals they have in common. Please convey to the President my cordial greeting and my esteem and closeness to the Argentine people who have given and continue to give so many proofs of their love and loyalty to the Successor of Peter. I am pleased to note the good diplomatic relations between the Argentine Nation and the Holy See. They are based on mutual respect and esteem and the desire for loyal cooperation with respect for the autonomy of each in its own province, and the search for the integral common good of each person and all peoples. In addition to being a privileged institutional channel, they are like a reflection of the historical and spiritual ties that unite the Argentine people, with deep Catholic roots, to the Chair of Peter. This very year one of the most important demonstrations of the Christian spirit of Argentinians will be commemorated: the inauguration of the monument to Christ the Redeemer that towers among the peaks of the Andes on the Chilean border. If, at that time, the monument expressed the confidence that with divine help the grave difficulties the Country was going through would be overcome, the solemnity with which the centenary celebrations are taking place today is a promising sign of hope. They revive that joyful faith and carry forward the commitment to continue fostering those values inspired by the Gospel that certainly contribute to building a more peaceful, supportive and reconciled society that strives constantly to improve the standard of living of all its citizens, without exception. The Church brings what is proper to her mission to the context of these relations whose purpose is the integral good of one and the same people. She thereby contributes to the well-being of nations. She encourages love of neighbour which, in turn, is an unfailing source of authentic development; she encourages fraternal attitudes which are the solid basis of all peaceful coexistence; and she inculcates in consciences rigorous respect for the innate dignity of human being and their rights, which are the foundation of a truly just social order. Argentina is a unique witness of the fruits that cordial relations

produce in various milieus, bringing a spirit of collaboration to relations between the Church and the nations. This has been so on certain occasions when thorny problems, threatening the inestimable value of peace, have been brought to a satisfactory conclusion through the process of dialogue and understanding. On others, the external factors that exercise an influence on serious economic situations have been minimized, but without neglecting to encourage those who suffer them to develop their great capacity for work and imagination so as to overcome them without either shirking responsibilities or sparing any effort. In this context, we cannot overlook the enormous amount of work done by numerous Catholics and Catholic institutions that have served and serve Argentine society in the most varied spheres, from culture to education, the advancement and care of the most underprivileged and the unemployed, in addition to the various forms of participation in the common good of the Nation. Many of these forms of cooperation for the Country's common good come to the fore especially in the difficult periods when for a variety of reasons uncertainty spreads and the need for hope, or the lack of it, increases. Therefore, defending and helping institutions that implement humanitarian initiatives or projects of human and social advancement are the proper competence of a clear-sighted public Authority committed to the good of all its citizens. In carrying out her mission, the Church never ceases to strive to invite all men and women of good will to build a society based on basic and indispensable values for a national and international order worthy of the human being. One of these is undoubtedly the value of human life. Lack of respect for it not only attacks the right to life of each human being from the moment of conception to natural death, which no one can claim the right to violate, but it also reduces the very foundation of all human coexistence. Indeed, it is fitting to ask what might be the meaning of the effort to improve the forms of social coexistence other than to guarantee life itself. This value therefore needs to be carefully safeguarded by reacting promptly to counter the many subtle plays to degrade the primordial good of life by objectifying it for other ends. Another pillar of society is marriage, the union of a man and a woman who are open to life, which gives rise to the natural institution of the family. It is not only older but also more universal than any other form of human coexistence which it supports, since it constitutes the first fabric of intimate relationships woven by love, mutual support and solidarity. The family, therefore, has its own rights and duties that it must exercise in the context of its own autonomy. In this regard, it is incumbent upon the legislative and political bodies of the larger societies, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, to guarantee these rights scrupulously and to help families to discharge their duties when they cannot carry them out with their own means. Here, it seems to me appropriate to recall that legislators, especially Catholic legislators, cannot contribute to formulating or approving laws contrary to "the primary and essential norms regulating the moral life", and consequently, to the loftiest values of the human person which ultimately come from God, the supreme legislator (cf. *Address to Government Leaders, Members of Parliament and Politicians*, 4 November 2000, n. 4; *L'Osservatore English edition [ORE]*, 8 November 2000, p. 7). It is necessary to recall this at a time when many seek to reduce marriage to a mere individual contract with features very different from those of marriage and the family, and end by degrading it as though it were a superfluous association within the social body. More than ever, therefore, the Public Authorities must protect and assist in all its dimensions the family, the basic cell of society, aware that by so doing they are promoting a just, stable and promising social development. Argentina has been and is particularly sensitive to these aspects, knowing that these are issues on which the whole of humanity's future depend. Consequently, I would like to express my appreciation for the efforts made in favour of marriage and the family at certain international meetings, while at the same time I ask that this course be pursued. Mr Ambassador, I once again offer you my very best wishes for your role as Ambassador of your Country to the Holy See, and I ask Our Lady of Luján, so close to Argentines, to enlighten you in your work of promoting the good will between the Pope and your noble Nation. I ask you also to encourage the efforts of both the Authorities and citizens to build a society that is more prosperous, more just and more open to the spiritual dimension. They will thus contribute not only to the good of their own homeland, but also to that of their Brother

Peoples in the *Cono Sur* of America, and of the entire international community. With these hopes, as I wish you a very pleasant stay in Rome, I impart to you my Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to your distinguished family and all those who work with you.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n.11 p. 5. © Copyright 2004 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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