



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr CÉSAR MAURICIO VELÁSQUEZ OSSA
NEW AMBASSADOR OF COLOMBIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 18 October 2010

Mr Ambassador,

With deep joy I offer you my cordial welcome on the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Colombia to the Holy See. In repeating my warm affection for the beloved children of your country, I express the wish that the mission your Government has entrusted to you may be fruitful.

I also thank you for your words and for the sentiments you have expressed to me on behalf of the President, H.E. Mr Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, who has recently assumed the eminent office of guiding this beloved nation on the path of progress in justice, protecting absolute respect for the basic rights of the person, ceaselessly journeying on towards increasingly noble and lofty goals — both human and spiritual. Kindly convey to him my best wishes for peace and wellbeing and the assurance of my prayers for the fruitful exercise of his important task.

Your presence and your kind words, Your Excellency, bring to mind once again the affection and devotion of a people known for its untarnished human and Christian virtues and its deep Catholic roots. Even amid difficult situations of various kinds, it has been able to preserve its faith in God and its firm determination to foster and put into practice the values of the Gospel, an inexhaustible source of energy and inspiration to engage in the noblest causes.

Mr Ambassador, you are beginning your delicate mandate to the Holy See at a particularly significant moment for Colombia. Indeed, the Bicentenary of the beginning of the process that led to Colombia's Independence and to the constitution of the Republic is being commemorated this year. I am sure that this important anniversary will be a unique opportunity to benefit from the lessons history furnishes, redoubling initiatives and measures that can consolidate security,

peace, harmony and the integral development of all your fellow-citizens looking with serenity and hope to the future, now at hand.

In this process the contribution of all is of fundamental importance, so that the deepest aspirations and the most longed for projects of the Colombian people may become, increasingly, a happy and encouraging reality.

Not only has the Catholic Church been present during the past two centuries but also in each stage of the development of your country's history, since the dawn of the arrival of the Spanish in America, constantly playing a fundamental and crucial role. In fact, the self-sacrificing work of so many Bishops, priests, religious and lay people has permanently marked the most varied contexts of your homeland's daily life: for example, on culture, art, health care, social coexistence and on the establishment of peace.

As the years have passed, in every corner of Colombia this spiritual legacy has germinated in a wide range of fruitful human, spiritual and material achievements. These efforts, not exempt from sacrifice and adversity, cannot be forgotten. It is well worth preserving them as a precious heritage and reinforcing them as a beneficial example for the whole nation.

In this regard, in the context of the Bicentenary and faithful to the office she has received from the Lord, the Church will continue to give the best of herself to the Colombian People in solidarity with their aspirations for improvement and helping everyone, on the basis of her mission.

In the same vein, in the Message of 30 June 2008 that I addressed to the Colombian Episcopal Conference for the Centenary of its foundation, I took the opportunity to urge the Bishops to continue, with foresight and mindful of the eloquent testimony of apostolic zeal of the Pastors who preceded them, "to respond with prompt dedication, firm faith and renewed fervour to the challenges that confront the Church in your Homeland", and "to serve everyone with enthusiasm, especially the most underprivileged, bringing them a message of peace, justice and reconciliation".

In this exciting undertaking the Church in Colombia demands no privileges. She only wants to serve the faithful and all who open the doors of their heart to her, with a hand stretched out; and she is ever willing to strengthen everything that will further the education of the new generations, the care of the sick and the elderly, respect for the Indigenous peoples and their legitimate traditions, the eradication of poverty, the drug trade and corruption and attention to prisoners, to the displaced, to migrants and to workers, as well as assistance to needy families.

It is ultimately a matter of continuing to offer loyal collaboration for the integral growth of communities in which Pastors, religious and faithful carry out their service, motivated solely by the demands inherent in their priestly ordination, their religious congregation or their Christian vocation.

In this framework of mutual cooperation and cordial relations between the Holy See and the Republic of Colombia — which this year is celebrating its 165th anniversary — I would like to express anew the Church's interest in protecting and encouraging the inviolable dignity of the human person.

This essentially requires that the juridical order respect the natural law in such essential areas as the safeguard of human life from its conception to its natural end; the right to be born and to live in a family founded on the marriage of a man and a woman and the right of parents to ensure that their children receive an education compatible with their own moral criteria or beliefs. These are all irreplaceable pillars in the building of a society truly worthy of human beings and the values inseparable from it.

Your Excellency, at this solemn meeting with you I likewise wish to express my spiritual closeness to, and prayers for, those who have been unjustly and cruelly deprived of their freedom. I also pray for their relatives and, in general, for the victims of violence in all its forms. At the same time I implore God to put an end to all this suffering once and for all and to obtain that all Colombians may live reconciled with one another and in peace in this blessed land, so full of natural resources, beautiful valleys and towering mountains, mighty rivers and picturesque landscapes that must be preserved as a magnificent gift of God.

Mr Ambassador, in concluding my Address I repeat my best wishes to you for the mission which you are beginning today and in which you will always find the welcoming support of my collaborators.

As I invoke the motherly intercession of Our Lady of Chiquinquirá upon you, Your Excellency, and upon the members of this Diplomatic Mission, upon the Government and upon the beloved Colombian People, I ask the Almighty to ensure that your Country play a leading role in the service to the common good and to brotherhood among all people and to encourage Colombians to walk unerringly on paths of reciprocal understanding and solidarity.