



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO EXECUTIVES OF ALITALIA 21 May 1979 Mr President and all of you from the "Alitalia"

Company! I am very happy to be able to meet you, this morning, in the cordial familiarity of this special Audience. Permitting me to see you again at close quarters, it reawakens, fresh and intact, in my mind the unforgettable emotions of the journey to Latin America. I wish in the first place to express to you my sincere gratitude for all your attention to me and to the persons who accompanied me. The ability of the pilots and their perfect control of the complex apparatus on board, the delicate and attentive solicitude of the personnel of the magnificent I-Dyne "Dante Alighieri", which your Company had put at our disposal, made possible a swift, safe and comfortable flight to that distant continent in which a fellow-countryman of yours planted the cross of Christ for the first time, nearly five centuries ago. A host of memories, images and emotions are present in my spirit when I recall the moment in which, with the anxiety of the missionary in my heart, I set foot on that land, in which the toil, the sacrifice, and the blood of so many generous proclaimers of the Gospel have brought forth abundant harvests, which are now "white for harvest" (Jn 4:35). The meeting with the ardent faith of those peoples and with their spontaneous and irrepressible enthusiasm was a unique experience for me which is stamped on my heart in indelible characters. The impetus, full of confidence, with which immense multitudes of persons flocked around Christ's humble Vicar—Christ who "is the centre of the universe and of history" (*Redemptor Hominis*, n. 1)—confirmed me in the conviction that the modern world is turning again to Christ "as the one who brings man freedom based on truth, frees man from what curtails, diminishes and as it were breaks off this freedom at its root, in man's soul, his heart and his conscience" (*ibid.* n. 12). Well, the work you carried out with exceptional skill and indefatigable dedication was the precious mediation which enabled me to take a word, a wish, a hope to the Church which "simul orat et laborat", at once prays and works (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 17), in Latin America. Renewing to you the attestation of my gratitude, I wish to assure you that there has been, and will be, a special place for you in my prayer. I know the difficulties of your work and I know that it requires, as well as thorough preparation and constant practice, exceptional mastery of one's nerves and a sound psychical balance which guarantee the capacity of lucid self-control even in unexpected and risky situations. These are interior qualities which can find a precious and strengthening support in a mature faith and in a sincere moral commitment according to the dictates of ancient Christian wisdom. Moreover, familiarity with the boundless spaces of the sky and the possibility of keeping at a distance, so to speak, "the threshing floor which makes us wax

so fierce" (Dante, Par 22:151), cannot but facilitate in the spirit of those who venture to those heights a clearer perception of the loving divine presence and a more serene and true view of the real values which make the life of a human being noble and worthy. My wish is that the thought of God, Father of all men, Creator of the lands over which you fly, and Lord of the skies that you furrow, will accompany you constantly in the accomplishment of your duty, enlighten you and support you in difficult moments, always inspire in you the right "route" in the choices of life, so that this decisive journey, which has its stop beyond the frontiers of time, may safely reach its destination, which is God himself. I confirm these wishes with a special Apostolic Blessing which I willingly extend to all members of the "Alitalia" Company and to your relatives, asking you to take it to them together with the assurance of my affectionate remembrance in prayer. © Copyright 1979 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana