



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE
TO NORWAY, ICELAND, FINLAND,
DENMARK AND SWEDEN

WELCOME CEREMONY IN SWEDEN

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Arlanda International Airport, Stockholm
Thursday, 8 June 1989

Your Royal Highnesses Prince Bertil and Princess Liliane,
Archbishop Werkström,
Bishop Brandenburg and Bishop Kenney.
Distinguished Members of the Government,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Dear People of Sweden,

Gud välsigna Sverige! With this prayer, I greet all the people of your country and ask God to bless you with his peace.

1. It is with great joy that I set foot upon Swedish soil this morning and begin my visit to this noble land. I am grateful to your *Royal Highnesses* for the warm welcome that you have extended to me *on behalf of His Majesty the King*. I likewise express my gratitude to Your Excellency, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and to the Swedish Government which, together with the Catholic community and the Swedish Church, has graciously invited me here today.

I come today to a people whose past has been marked by a deep Christian faith and a commitment to the goals of peace, tolerance and the advancement of genuine human dignity. It is my prayer that this heritage and these values may continue to flourish among you and serve as a beacon of hope to illuminate the future of your society and all its members.

2. I have come to Sweden as minister of the Gospel of Jesus *Christ and as the Bishop of Rome*. As a preacher of the Gospel, I rely on God's grace to proclaim to all who dwell within these borders the grace and peace which come from God, the "Father of mercies" (2Cor. 1, 3). As the Bishop of Rome, I wish to visit the members of the Catholic Church in this country. Dear brothers and sisters in the Catholic faith: during these days I will have the joy of sharing in your ecclesial life, listening to your concerns and hopes for the Church in Sweden, praying with you and celebrating the Eucharist, the mystery of our faith!

In Bishop Brandenburg and Bishop Kenney, I greet the Catholic people of Sweden with love and great affection. The Diocese of Stockholm reflects the richness and diversity of people which mark the entire Catholic Church. It can thus, by God's grace, bear eloquent witness to the unity and charity which should characterize the lives of all Christ's followers. In the Church of God, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3, 28).

3. It is also my ardent hope that this pastoral visit will contribute to the growth of understanding and fraternal love among all who profess the name of Christ. The Church of Rome in our own day continues to venerate *the memory of Saint Birgitta of Sweden*, whose intrepid Christian faith contributed greatly to the Church's spiritual renewal some six hundred years ago. As I visit the homeland of Saint Birgitta. I cannot but recall *the long and rich Christian heritage* which is shared by all Swedish Christians in spite of the divisions which have arisen. That heritage has the power to inspire us all in our search to obey the Lord's will and to restore the bonds of unity in faith among Christians. With this conviction, I extend my heartfelt greeting in the Lord to *Archbishop Werkström and to all the faithful of the Swedish Lutheran Church*.

In the name of Jesus Christ, I greet all the people of this country and assure you of my prayers for your continued peace and prosperity. The Gospel which I preach is a message of hope, and it is directed to all men and women, to people of every race and tongue (Cfr. *Apoc. 5, 9*). I am grateful for the opportunity to carry this message to these shores, and I thank all of you for the friendly interest which has surrounded the news of my coming.

4. Throughout the world, Sweden is known and respected for her efforts to secure the well-being of all her people. Indeed, *Sweden enjoys a "quality of life"* which, even when measured in material terms alone, represents an impressive achievement. Your interest in international cooperation and disarmament is also well known. These initiatives, together with your *generosity in foreign aid*, serve as an encouragement to other nations as they too seek to provide the best for their people, according to their own abilities and in the light of their own history. Sweden's attainments in areas such as health care, education and concern for the welfare of *immigrants* must be seen as a sign of hope on the horizon of the world's genuine development and progress.

Your record in all of these areas is a source of gratification to the Holy See, which seeks to

advance the cause of true development, justice and peace within the community of nations. In this context, I am pleased to recall that in 1982 Sweden and the Holy See established formal *diplomatic relations*, thus resuming traditional contacts which date back to the sixteenth century. I pray that your continuing efforts to promote understanding among people will bear much fruit and will merit for you the blessing which has been reserved for those who are peacemakers and shall therefore be called children of God (Cfr. *Matth.* 5, 9).

5. *True peace*, the peace which is the work of justice (Cfr. *Is.* 32, 17), requires a *continual sensitivity to the ethical and religious values* underlying all of human activity. Among these values, respect for the gift of life in all its forms, accompanied by unselfish service of others – especially those in need and those less fortunate than ourselves – constitute the essential foundation of a truly just and humane society. The pursuit of these goals has deep spiritual roots, and represents the fruit of that yearning of the human heart for the profound fulfilment which the Bible calls *shalom*, peace (Cfr. *Ps.* 121, 6-9).

Dear friends: may that peace of God, the peace which surpasses all understanding (*Phil.* 4, 7), dwell in your hearts and in your homes. May God continue to bless Sweden and all her people!

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