



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr J. FERNARD TANGUAY,
AMBASSADOR OF CANADA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 31 October 1997

Mr Ambassador,

1. In receiving the Letters accrediting Your Excellency to the Apostolic See as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Canada, I am pleased to welcome you to the Eternal City. I thank you warmly for your words, which show your interest in and understanding of the Catholic Church's life and activity.

Touched by the messages you convey from the Prime Minister and other members of the Government, I would be grateful if you would convey all my gratitude to them.

You have expressed how attached to the See of Peter are Catholics belonging to the First Nations of your land, whom I was pleased to greet during my visits to Canada and also on the occasion of their various meetings here; please tell them I remember them and give them my cordial thanks for these signs of thoughtfulness in my regard. I am moved by the wishes you convey to me from your compatriots of Polish descent and I am grateful to them for their fidelity to the Church, as well as to the land and culture which are so dear to us.

2. Mr Ambassador, you have kindly wished to recall several aspects of the Church's activity and particularly that of the Holy See in promoting peace; and you have stressed that its prevailing spirit corresponds to your country's role in international life and to its principles. I am therefore pleased to note once again the convergence of the concerns of the Catholic Church with those of your country regarding the still unfinished tasks of reinforcing peace in the world and of a development which should ensure the lasting well-being of nations. Canada takes part in the discussions of

international organizations and your compatriots do not hesitate to be generously involved in humanitarian aid and peace-keeping, sometimes at a great distance from their country and at the price of real sacrifices. Their devotion to the great causes of humanity is widely appreciated and, we hope, will spur many others effectively to pursue the same objectives.

In the important and sensitive area of disarmament, the necessity of which humanity should understand more clearly, you have appropriately drawn attention to the process finally undertaken to ban those terrible weapons, anti-personnel land-mines. Ottawa, your capital, will soon be hosting the signatories to an agreement meant to prevent the death or mutilation of great numbers of innocent people in many regions of the world. I ardently hope that every country will adhere to this agreement, and that there will be no delay in freeing multitudes of men, women and children from these destructive devices insidiously buried under their steps.

When we consider the conflicts that continue to rend peoples on different continents, I can understand your lament that in many places "a heritage of hatred and revenge is passed on from generation to generation". No one can be resigned to the continuation of these confrontations. The efforts of peacemakers should not be a question of merely limiting the effects of conflicts, treating the wounded, dealing with food shortages or welcoming refugees as well as possible, even if the efforts to do so must be maintained and increased. In the name of the Gospel message, the Church continues to call our contemporaries to accept and respect one another, to consider clearly the historic origins of conflicts, in order better to overcome them, and to develop the harmony to which the one human family is called by its profound common destiny. The intensification of relations between individuals and peoples of goodwill has its greatest *raison d'être* in this spirit; and I am certain that it is here that your compatriots and their leaders will discover the Catholic Church's concern for the common good of humanity.

3. A significant number of your fellow citizens, as you have pointed out, Mr Ambassador, are members of the Catholic Church, firmly rooted in your land since the first generations of Gospel pioneers came from Europe in the 17th century. Through you, I would like to send the Bishop of Rome's friendly greetings to all Canadian Catholics. I know the fruits of holiness and missionary dynamism produced by their forebears. They are attached to them, as their fervour testifies when they celebrate the anniversaries of the foundations that gradually built up their Dioceses and communities. Today I encourage them to continue with this building, perhaps less visible than before, but founded on hearts by adherence to the Gospel truth and made firm and radiant by fraternal communion.

The history of your land is such that in Canada the Church herself is visibly different: there are many cultural origins, and the Eastern-rite traditions are still alive. This situation is a true source of richness and certainly helps Canadian Catholics to be aware of the unity in diversity which characterizes Christ's disciples.

4. Today my thoughts also turn to your compatriots who come from other Churches or Ecclesial Communities; I greet them as brothers and sisters, in the desire that exchanges should continue between them and Catholics, in order to seek the truth, an essential condition for advancing towards the full communion so ardently desired and for establishing social life on a solid human basis.

Together with the members of other religious traditions, Catholics are committed to deepening the dialogue: that of daily social interaction in the same cities and that of a more developed mutual knowledge; thus it will be possible for all persons of different religious convictions to work together in order to make the life of society ever more human. In Canada I am sure that Catholics are keen to advance in the knowledge of these different relations and dialogues, which cannot fail to benefit everyone.

5. Your mission, Mr Ambassador, begins just before the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops, which will be held in Rome. Prepared by your experience of international life and your knowledge of ecclesial life, you can follow the exchanges of this exceptional meeting between the Pastors of the Catholic Church in North, Central and South America. You will certainly contribute to making your compatriots understand the nature of the pastoral quest which the members of this Assembly will undertake together with the Bishop of Rome and his co-workers, and in conjunction with the representatives of the Episcopate of the other continents. Through detailed consultations of this kind, the Catholic Church wishes to be ever more faithful to her mission of service to her brothers and sisters of this age, especially in this case by reinforcing the solidarity which unites the different communities on your continent.

6. Your Excellency, as you begin your office, I hope that you will successfully fulfil your duties, so that the Holy See's relations with Canada may be continually strengthened. I hope that you will find at the See of Peter the satisfaction you expect from your stay in Rome.

Be assured that, on the part of my co-workers, you will find a considerate welcome and any help you may need.

In your person, I greet the Rt Honourable Governor-General, the authorities and all the Canadian people, as I offer everyone my very best wishes for happiness and prosperity.

May God grant all the benefits of his blessings to you, as well as to your loved ones, the members of your embassy, the authorities of your countries and all your compatriots.

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