



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO CUBA (JANUARY 21-26, 1998)FAREWELL CEREMONYADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL IISunday, 25 January
1998 Mr President,

Cardinal Ortega and Brothers in the Episcopate,

Esteemed Civil Authorities,

*Dear Cuban Brothers and Sisters,*1. I have experienced intense and emotion-filled days with the pilgrim People of God in the beautiful land of Cuba which has left in me its profound imprint. I take with me the memory of the faces of so many people whom I met during these days. I am grateful to you for your *cordial hospitality, an authentic expression of the Cuban soul*, and above all for being able to share with you *intense moments of prayer and reflection* in the celebration of Holy Mass in Santa Clara, in Camagüey, in Santiago de Cuba and here in Havana, as well as in the visit completed just a few hours ago to the metropolitan cathedral.2. I ask God to bless and repay all who have worked in bringing about this visit, so long desired. I thank you, Mr President, and also the other authorities of the nation for your presence here as well as for the co-operation lent in the actual carrying out of this visit, in which as many people as possible have participated, either by attending the celebrations or by following them through the media. I am very grateful to my Brother *Bishops of Cuba for their work and pastoral concern* in preparation both for my visit and for the mission among the people which preceded it, the immediate fruits of which have already been seen in the warm welcome received; this mission must in some way continue.3. As Successor of the Apostle Peter and following the Lord's command, *I have come as a messenger of truth and hope*, to confirm you in faith and to leave you a message of peace and reconciliation in Christ. Therefore I encourage you to continue to walk together, inspired by the highest moral principles, so that the vitality which characterizes this noble people will produce abundant fruits of well-being and of spiritual and material prosperity for the benefit of everyone.4. Before leaving this capital city, *I wish to bid an emotional farewell to all the sons and daughters of this nation*: to those who live in the cities and in the countryside; to the children, the young people and the elderly; to the families and each individual person. I am confident that they will continue to preserve and promote the most genuine values of the Cuban heart. Faithful to the heritage received from your forebears and despite difficulties, the Cuban spirit must ever show its trust in God, its Christian faith, its ties to the Church, its love for the culture and traditions of the homeland, its vocation to justice and freedom. In the process of doing precisely this, *all Cubans are called to contribute to the common good* in a climate of mutual respect and with a profound sense of solidarity. In our day, no nation can live in isolation. *The Cuban people therefore cannot be denied the contacts with other peoples* necessary for economic, social and cultural development, especially when the *imposed isolation strikes the population indiscriminately, making it ever more difficult for the weakest* to enjoy the bare essentials of decent living, things such as food, health and education. All can and should take practical steps to bring about changes in this regard. May nations, and especially those which share

the same Christian heritage and the same language, work effectively to extend the benefits of unity and harmony, to join efforts and overcome obstacles so that the Cuban people, as the active agents of their own history, may maintain international relations which promote the common good. In this way they will be helped to overcome the suffering caused by material and moral poverty, the roots of which may be found, among other things, in unjust inequalities, in limitations to fundamental freedoms, in depersonalization and the discouragement of individuals, and in *oppressive economic measures* — unjust and ethically unacceptable — imposed from outside the country.⁵ Dear people of Cuba, as I leave this cherished land, I take with me the indelible memories of these days and *a great confidence in the future of your homeland*. Build it with vision, guided by the light of faith, with the fervour of hope and the generosity of fraternal love. These are capable of creating a climate of greater freedom and pluralism, in the certainty that God loves you intensely and remains faithful to his promises. In effect, *"to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men"* (1 Tm 4:10). May he fill you with his blessings and in every moment may you experience his closeness. Praised be Jesus Christ! *The Holy Father then said extemporaneously:* A final word about the rain. Now it has stopped, but since my visit to the cathedral of Havana it has rained rather hard. I wondered why the rain came after these warm days, after Santiago de Cuba where it was so hot. It could be a sign: the Cuban skies are weeping because the Pope is going away, because he is leaving us. That would be a superficial interpretation. When we sing in the liturgy: "Rorate caeli desuper et nubes pluant iustum", it is Advent. I think this is a more profound interpretation. This rain during the last hours of my stay in Cuba may signify an advent. My wish is that this rain will be a good sign of a new advent in your history. Thank you very much.