



The Holy See

DEPARTURE CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Wednesday 27 June 2001

Lviv (Airport)

Mr President of the Republic of Ukraine,

Your Eminences,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Ukrainians,

1. The moment of farewell has arrived. With affection I greet all of you here present and through you I greet the people of Ukraine whom I have come to know better during these days. I especially greet the people of the cities of Kyiv and Lviv who welcomed me, and those who came from other cities and regions to meet me.

Upon my arrival, I felt embraced by the affection of the city of *Kyiv* with its golden domes and tapestry of gardens. I then experienced the traditional hospitality of *Lviv*, a city of famous monuments, rich in Christian memories.

I am now sad to leave this land, which is a *crossroads of peoples and cultures*, where over a thousand years ago the Gospel began its course to spread and take root in the historical and cultural fabric of the peoples of Eastern Europe. To each and every one of you I say again: Thank you!

2. *Thank you, Ukraine*, who defended Europe in your untiring and heroic struggle against invaders.

Thank you, civil and military Authorities, and all of you who in different ways and with great generosity have cooperated in ensuring the successful outcome of my visit.

Thank you, dear Brothers and Sisters, who are part of this Christian community, "faithful unto death" (*Rev 2:10*). It has been my long-standing wish to express my admiration and appreciation for the heroic witness that you have borne during

the long winter of persecution in the past century.

Thank you for your prayers and the long spiritual preparation you made for this meeting with the Successor of Peter, so that he would be able to confirm you in faith and help you to live in the fraternal love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:7).

As I depart from Ukrainian soil I extend respectful and heartfelt greeting to the brothers and sisters and to the Pastors of the venerable Orthodox Church.

I bear you all in my prayer and I greet you all in Saint Paul's words of blessing to the Christians of Thessalonika: "May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways" (2 Th 3:16).

3. May the Lord give you peace, People of Ukraine, who with tenacious and harmonious dedication have at last recovered your freedom, and have begun the work of rediscovering your truest roots. You are committed to an arduous path of reforms aimed at giving everyone the possibility of following and practising their own faith, culture and convictions in a framework of freedom and justice.

Even if you still feel the painful scars of the tremendous wounds inflicted over endless years of oppression, dictatorship and totalitarianism, during which the rights of the people were denied and trampled upon, look with confidence to the future. This is the opportune time! This is the time for hope and daring!

My hope is that Ukraine will be able fully to become a part of the Europe which will take in the entire continent from the Atlantic to the Urals. As I said at the end of that year 1989 which was of such great importance in the recent history of the continent, there cannot be "a peaceful Europe capable of spreading civilization without the interaction and sharing of the different though complementary values" which are characteristic of the peoples of East and West (*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XXX/2, 1989, p. 1591).

4. In this important and significant transition, the Church, conscious of her mission, will not fail to exhort the faithful *to cooperate actively with the State* in the promotion of the common good. There is in fact a social charity, which is expressed in "service to culture, politics, the economy and the family, so that the fundamental principles upon which depend the destiny of human beings and the future of civilization will be everywhere respected" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 51).

Furthermore, Christians know that they are by right *an integral part of the Ukrainian nation*. They are so by virtue of a thousand-year history, which began with the baptism of Volodymyr and Kievan Rus' in 988 in the waters of the Dnieper river; but they are especially so today, because of the baptism of blood which they received in the course of the tremendous persecutions of the 20th century: in those terrible years countless were the witnesses to the faith, not only Catholics but also Orthodox and Reformed Christians, who underwent deprivations of all kinds for love of Christ, in many cases even to the sacrifice of their lives.

5. *Unity and harmony!* This is the secret of peace and the condition for true and stable social progress. It is thanks to this

combination of intentions and actions that Ukraine, homeland of faith and dialogue, will see its dignity recognized in the community of nations.

The solemn warning of your great poet Taras Shevchenko comes to mind: "Only in your own house will you find truth, strength and freedom". People of Ukraine, it is into the *fertile soil of your own traditions* that *the roots of your future* stretch! Together you can build that future; together you will be able to face the challenges of the present time, inspired by the common ideals that form the indelible heritage of your past and recent history. The mission is common to all; may the commitment taken on by the entire Ukrainian people also be common to all!

To you, land of Ukraine, I renew *my wish for prosperity and peace*. You have left unforgettable memories in my heart! Goodbye, friendly people, whom I embrace with sympathy and affection! Thank you for your heartfelt welcome and hospitality, which I shall never forget!

Goodbye, Ukraine! I make my own the words of your greatest poet and I invoke every blessing of the "strong and just God" upon the children of your land, "a hundred times stained with blood, once a glorious land". Dear Brothers and Sisters, with your poet and with you I say: May God protect you always, "o holy, holy, land of mine!".

I ask Almighty God to bless you, the people of Ukraine, and to heal all your wounds. May his great love fill your hearts and guide you in the Third Christian Millennium towards a new future . In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!