



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT IN KAZAKHSTAN FAREWELL CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

*International Airport
Astana, 25 September 2001*

Mr President,

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. These three memorable days which have enabled me to meet so many people here in Astana and to experience at first hand the vitality of the Kazakh people are coming to an end. The memory of my stay in this noble country, rich in history and cultural traditions, will be with me for a long time.

I thank you for the kind and heartfelt welcome which you have given me. I thank you, Mr President, for the exquisite hospitality which you have shown in all sorts of ways. I thank the administrative, military and religious authorities as well as those who prepared my visit and took care of its organization. To each and every one of you I express my most sincere gratitude.

The words which I have heard in the various moments we have spent together remain impressed on my mind. I have in mind the hopes and expectations of this dear people, which I have come to know and respect more deeply: a people that has suffered *years of harsh persecution*, but has not hesitated to commit itself with enthusiasm to *the path of development*. A people seeking to build a serene future for its children, marked by solidarity, because it loves and seeks peace.

2. Kazakhstan, a nation which has centuries of history behind it, knows how important and urgent peace is. Because of your geographical position, you are a frontier land and a land of encounter.

Here, in these endless steppes, men and women of different races, cultures and religions have met and continue to meet in peace.

Kazakhstan, may you with God's help *grow in unity and solidarity!* This is the heartfelt wish that I repeat as I recall the theme of this entire visit: "*Love one another!*" (Jn 13:34). These demanding words of Jesus, uttered on the eve of his death on the Cross, have inspired and marked each stage of my pilgrimage.

"*Love one another!*" This country, home to men and women of different origins, needs solid agreements and stable social relations. It is not an exaggeration to say that your country has a vocation all its own: that of being, in an ever more conscious way, *a bridge between Europe and Asia*. May this be your civil and religious choice. Be a bridge made up of people who embrace other people: people who communicate fullness of life and hope.

3. In saying farewell to you, dear Kazakh people, I wish to assure you that *the Church will continue to be at your side*. In close cooperation with the other religious communities and with all men and women of goodwill, Catholics will not fail to do their part to ensure that all together can build a common home which is ever more open and welcoming.

The quest for dialogue and harmony has characterized relations between Christianity and Islam here ever since the time of the formation of the Turkish Khanate in the endless spaces of your steppes, and this has enabled your country to become *a junction between East and West* on the great Silk Road. The younger generations too should follow this path with renewed commitment.

"Love one another!" This demanding saying of the Lord tests our credibility as Christians. Jesus himself warns: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

4. The Great Jubilee of the Year Two Thousand spurred Christians to an intense spiritual reawakening and called them to be *witnesses to love* in order to respond to the challenges of the third millennium. May you also be witnesses to love, without respite! Be ready to promote "peace, so often threatened by the spectre of catastrophic wars" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 51). Be vigilant watchmen, committed to "respect for the life of every human being" (*Ibid.*).

Men and women of other religions who have the destiny of your people at heart, may you also be witnesses to love! Abai Kunanbai's question is directed to us all: "If I have been given the name of man, can I fail to love?" (*Poetry* 12). I am happy to echo this question now as I leave you: *can a human being fail to love?*

As the Successor of the Apostle Peter, as I recall the many events which have marked the history of the past century, I repeat: Look to the future with confidence! I have come among you as a

pilgrim of hope, and I now prepare to undertake my return journey, not without emotion and nostalgia. The memories of these days will go with me; I will carry the certainty that you, people of Kazakhstan, will not fail in your mission of solidarity and peace.

May God bless and protect you always!