



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC
OF BELARUS TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 17 May 2002

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to welcome you on this solemn occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as the first Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Belarus to the Holy See.

As I thank you for your kind words expressing the spirit in which you desire to begin your mission, I would be grateful if you would convey my courteous greetings to H.E. President Alexandre Loukachenko of Belarus and assure the Belarusian people of my warmest best wishes for their harmonious human and spiritual development.

2. In your address you stressed that the stage reached today is a milestone in the development of relations between the Holy See and your country, and a sign that the authorities and the Belarusian people hope to affirm the country's social cohesion and its place among the nations of Europe and in the concert of nations. It is also an evident expression of the will of people who want to open themselves to others in international life through dialogue and acceptance of others with respect for their different cultures and traditions.

3. You recall the coexistence of different religious confessions in the nation as one of Belarus' greatest advantages. This reality is the fruit of the history of your country and still belongs to its culture today. It is rooted in the right to religious freedom, an inalienable right of every human being that is one of the most fundamental rights, for it is directly related to freedom of conscience. It is important that everywhere it be recognized by civil society and guaranteed by the State. Such a step does honour to the countries which respect it. You know that the Catholic Church is very

attached to safeguarding this freedom which must always be able to find a place within the framework of a country's legislation and practice. I am delighted to know that Belarus is especially concerned with this aspect of the life of persons and human groups and that Catholics freely enjoy this right, which enables them to play their part in the life of the country and to contribute to the construction of society together with their compatriots.

4. The Catholic Church has an essentially spiritual mission: to enable the Gospel to be proclaimed to all people, so that, by deeply imbuing their life and culture, they may lead a personal and a community life in conformity with evangelical values in view of the common good. The Church has no intention of replacing the legitimate authorities and does not want her faithful to be relegated to the fringes of society, as if they were alien to it but she would like them, nourished and renewed by the Word of life, always to continue to be active participants in national life. The reorganization of your country's dioceses, desired by the Holy See and carried out several years ago out of pastoral concern for their faithful, serves the Church's integration into the life of the nation. In this spirit, I rejoice at the recent opening of a second seminary in Pinsk, to form the priests who belong to this people and are imbued with its culture. It is an obvious sign of the spiritual fruitfulness of the Belarusian land. I also know that the action of Catholics, especially in the social context and in assistance to the neediest, is appreciated by the authorities as an effective participation in the country's development. In this regard, I hope that all the institutions concerned will continue to guarantee the work of the ecclesial community and the Catholic institutions, which are at the service of everyone, in order to permit the Catholic Church to exercise ever more her spiritual mission in your country.

5. Mr Ambassador, I am glad through you to be able to greet the Catholic faithful of Belarus. I thank God for their courageous fidelity during the difficult and painful times of the past. I invite them to use their rediscovered freedom to renew and intensify relations between the ecclesial communities for the service of all. I know of the pastors' work to implant the faith more deeply in living communities, through the liturgy celebrated in the national language thanks also to the doctrinal and spiritual formation of the laity. I thank the priests and the men and women religious who generously dedicate their lives to their brothers and sisters, and I assure all the lay faithful of my spiritual closeness in prayer. I invite them to be true witnesses of Christ's love for everyone, so that all may know the riches of God's mercy.

6. At the moment when you begin your mission as your country's representative to the Holy See, Mr Ambassador, please accept my very best wishes for your success. I assure you that you will always find among my collaborators an attentive welcome and cordial understanding to help you in your noble function.

I invoke an abundance of the Lord's Blessings upon you, Your Excellency, upon your family, upon your staff and upon the entire Belarusian people.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English n.23 p.3,8.*

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