



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC
ON THE 10th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE REPUBLIC'S INDEPENDENCE***

Monday, 28 October 2002

Mr President,

1. I am delighted to offer you a cordial welcome on this visit which you have wished to pay me on the 10th anniversary of the Independence of the Slovak Republic. I gratefully remember the greeting we exchanged last 18 August at Kraków, during my pilgrimage to Poland. Today's meeting confirms the feelings of mutual esteem that pervade the relations between your country and the Holy See.

In greeting you, Mr President, I would also like to extend affectionate greetings to the beloved inhabitants of Slovakia, who for centuries have looked to the Successor of Peter with feelings of deep devotion and sincere attachment. A profound, reciprocal bond was formed which since the time of Cyril and Methodius has continued to develop and grow deeper. The faith of the Slovak people is solid and rich, due to the work of enlightened and generous Pastors who knew how to be close to their faithful in both pleasant and sorrowful times.

With their robust Christian identity, the Slovak People look confidently to Europe, to which Slovakia belongs by geographical location, history and culture. I am certain that the upcoming entry of your country into the European Union, besides the benefit it will bring to you, will contribute to the well-being and stability of the entire continent. Ten years after Independence, it is only right to point out the long journey travelled and the goals achieved, despite the complex problems that in this period had to be faced.

2. Today's circumstances are very important from the view point of bilateral relations. Indeed, we

will exchange the instruments of ratification of the Agreement on religious assistance to the Catholic faithful in the Armed Forces and Police of the Republic, signed in Bratislava last 21 August (*ORE*, 28 August 2002, p. 12). This Agreement is one of the consequences of the basic Accord established in November 2000 between the Holy See and Slovakia.

The Church does not seek privileges or favours, but only asks to be able to carry out her mission with respect for the laws that regulate civil coexistence. For this reason, in recognizing fully the sovereignty of the State, she intends to maintain a relationship of cordial and constructive dialogue with its various institutions. Her main goal is to serve as best she can within her area of responsibility the Slovak people. This dialogue is so very useful when one realizes that in Slovakia, before the Independence, the Catholic Church had to undergo a period of harsh persecution under the Communist regime. Now she lives and flourishes once again in freedom, and wants to contribute to the integral well-being of the people of whom she is a part.

The importance of the Church's action is obvious, especially in the current circumstances in which the young democracy has to confront the problems connected with the heritage of the Marxist ideology, but also with the tumultuous process of modernization, with the phenomenon of unemployment and with the consequent danger for those in need, of becoming involved in illegal activities.

3. Mr President, the recognized force of spirit of your fellow citizens, their solid Christian tradition, their desire to build their own present and future in freedom are a cause of hope for the future of the Slovak people.

As I express my deep pleasure for the attention which the Government and Parliament of the Republic are paying to the mission of the Church, I desire to confirm the understanding and support of the Holy See for the efforts that Slovakia is making to create a free, peaceful and solidary society.

With these sentiments, as I assure you of my remembrance in prayer, I cordially impart my Blessing to you, to those who have accompanied you and to all your compatriots.

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