



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO SARAJEVO (APRIL 12-13, 1997)

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
AT THE MEETING WITH BISHOPS
OF BOSNIA-HERCEGOVINA**

*Sarajevo
Sunday, 13 April 1997*

Your Eminence,

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopacy!*¹. I have fervently desired to have this fraternal meeting with you and am grateful to God for having been able to celebrate with you the Holy Eucharist, the culminating moment of the Church's life. Union around the altar makes more clear the bond which links us to Christ and establishes the communion which exists between us and with the People of God. I greet you, Cardinal Vinko Puljic who, assisted by Bishop Pero Sudar, shepherd with courage and wisdom the flock of the Church of Vrhbosna- Sarajevo; I greet you, Bishop Franjo Komarica, strong Bishop of the tormented Church of Banja Luka; I greet you, Bishop Ratko Peric, who zealously preside over the Church of Mostar-Duvno and are Apostolic Administrator of Trebinje-Mrkan. I wish to thank each one of you for the fearless witness borne before the Church of God during the recent conflict when, despite grave dangers and the difficult situation, you always remained with your communities, watchful and concerned, sharing their sufferings, tragedies and every kind of deprivation. In showing my sentiments of affection to you Pastors, I wish to send my most heartfelt greeting to the Churches entrusted to you: your priests, consecrated persons, lay faithful, especially those afflicted in body or spirit due to the consequences of the suffering caused by the recent war. The Successor of Peter is in your midst. He knows your sufferings and hard work and he confirms you in your faith, as we look to Christ, our advocate with the Father and our sure peace.² Divine Providence has chosen you to shepherd the People of God and has made you examples for the flock (cf. 1 Pet 5:2-3). Through your ministry, and in communion with the Successor of Peter, you continue the work of Christ, the eternal Shepherd of souls, who teaches all people and sanctifies with the gift of the Sacraments those who receive his word in faith. In this task which God has entrusted to you, you are not alone. By governing your Churches in communion with one another and with the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter, you are constituted members of the episcopal body and therefore called to share in the care of the universal Church (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 22; *Christus*

Dominus, 4). Be zealous, Venerable Brothers, in preserving communion with the Bishops of the whole world, beginning with those of the region and, especially, of Croatia. Be diligent also in mutual charity, in frank and cordial dialogue, in helping one another. May the love which reigns among you be an example for the priests who assist you, the faithful who look to you as enlightened guides, and for the people of good will who often seek in your words and authority an impulse for building a society truly inspired by the values of peace, harmony and justice.³ The conflict which took place in your region for five very long years puts before you problems which are certainly not easy. With the din of arms ended, the will to build peace must now become ever stronger. The first task which awaits you on this arduous path is to heal minds tried by suffering and, at Times New Roman New Roman, hardened by feelings of hatred and revenge. This is a process which requires all your energy, strengthened by faith in Christ, the Lord of life and Physician of the spirit. This is also the goal which you set for yourselves in your Pastoral Letter of last February. You are called to be the bearers of a new culture which, flowing from the inexhaustible source of the Gospel, preaches respect for everyone; it calls for mutual forgiveness of faults as the presupposition of the renewal of civil life; it fights with the arms of love to ensure that the will to cooperate in the promotion of the one common good will be strengthened. This does not dispense you from raising a prophetic voice to denounce cases of violence, to unmask injustices, to call by name what is evil, to defend with every legitimate means the communities entrusted to you. This is especially necessary when excesses springing from minds embittered by past violence try to strike directly at believers and the Church by intimidation or acts of intolerance. Do not be afraid to make your voices heard through every legitimate means at your disposal, without letting yourselves be intimidated by any earthly power.⁴ Now, after the recent violence, it is a question of rebuilding not only the Christian community but also civil society, damaged and scattered by so many disasters. In this task God does not leave you alone. He has placed at your side priests, consecrated persons and actively committed lay people, who support your efforts and are ready to listen to your voice, so that there may flourish once more the proclamation which saves, the love which soothes, the solidarity which unites everyone. As you give thanks to the Lord for these gifts, try to make the most of the vitality of each individual so that the path of the new evangelization may be followed with renewed vigour. Try to understand with fatherly goodness the difficulties which your closest co-workers meet every day; support them with your prayer and your kind heart, encouraging them to have recourse to the energies which flow from a daily encounter with Christ, the Eternal High Priest, particularly in prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist. May your solicitude as Fathers in the faith bring out the best in everyone, so that the gifts of each may benefit the Christian community and civil society. The cooperation of everybody must not be lacking in the planning and the carrying out of pastoral programmes of the individual Dioceses, under your guidance and with due respect for the specific nature of each charism, whether of secular priests or Religious, so that the mutual exchange of gifts may increase charity, reduce tensions and serve unity. According to these criteria and values educate your seminarians as well, so that they may gain a clear awareness that one day they will be called to serve the Church with sacrifice, conviction and generosity, and in obedience to their legitimate Pastor.⁵ The main work to which you will not tire of devoting yourselves is "prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4), in order that the Gospel of Christ may continue to be proclaimed in this region, and that the precious "word of life" may bring hope and consolation to the peoples of Bosnia- Hercegovina. It is through presiding at the liturgical assembly, especially in the Holy Eucharist, that you distribute God's gifts for the nourishment of the faithful, after having instructed them openly in the "truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago" (Tit 1:1-2). The Church, at the end of this Millennium and now at the threshold of the next, must continue perseveringly in her mission of proclaiming the Good News, so that "all men will be saved" (1 Tim 2:4). May the three-year period of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 find you zealous in your preaching, according to the programme that I myself have set forth in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*. In following these

objectives, you build up the Body of Christ (cf. Eph 4:12) in these lands, in communion with the whole Church.⁶ In spite of her poverty, the Church in Bosnia-Herzegovina should not forget the poor who knock at her doors. The destruction caused by the recent conflict has left you with an inheritance of devastated families, widows and orphans, refugees and evacuees, the crippled and afflicted. You must remain close to them and bring the relief of your practical charity and pastoral concern. In this regard, I cannot fail to give special praise to the organizations of *Caritas*, which in the individual Dioceses have done and are doing so much to relieve the sufferings of those in difficulty. The witness of charity favours greater understanding between the different cultures and religions which flourish in this region, since suffering and need have no frontiers. Through the tender gesture of charity, you contribute to sincere dialogue with all your fellow citizens and work for the building of a civilization of love. Thus, by forgiving and asking for forgiveness, it will be possible to leave behind the spiral of mutual recriminations and decisively take the path of moral and civil reconstruction. "As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Col 3:13). The method of dialogue, pursued with perseverance and in depth, therefore, must in the first place mark relations with your Orthodox brothers and sisters, and the other Christian brethren, with whom we are united by many bonds of faith. With cordial words and a sincere attitude, you should also look for opportunities for meeting and understanding the followers of Islam. This will favour the establishment of peaceful coexistence in mutual respect for the rights of every individual and every people.⁷ Venerable Brothers, while the Successor of Peter wishes today to confirm you in your good intentions, he also wishes to say to you once again that you are not alone on your journey. We are with you and we shall always be with you in supporting the efforts that you are making, so that in the whole Church there may be strengthened the "love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14). I entrust your apostolic endeavours to the maternal protection of Mary, Mother of the Church and Queen of Peace, whom you and the communities entrusted to you honour with great devotion. May the Mother of God, model of perfection for the whole Church, support you in your labours and plans, so that the Paschal hymn may continue to echo throughout your lands: "Scimus Christum surrexisse a mortuis vere. Tu nobis, victor Rex, miserere!". With these sentiments I impart to each of you, as a sign of my affection, a special Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to the priests, men and women Religious and all the faithful to whom you offer your pastoral care. © Copyright 1997 -

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