



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA

FAREWELL CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Airport of Detroit
Saturday, 19 September 1987*

*Mr Vice President,
Dear Friends, dear People of America,*

1. Once again God has given me the joy of making a pastoral visit to your country—the United States of America. I am filled with *gratitude to him and to you*. I thank the Vice President for his presence here today, and I thank all of you from my heart for the kindness and warm hospitality that I have received everywhere.

I cannot leave without expressing my thanks *to all those who worked so hard* to make this visit possible. In particular I thank my brother bishops and all their collaborators who for many months have planned and organized all the details of the last ten days. My gratitude goes to all those who provided *security* and ensured such excellent *public order*. I thank all those who have worked to make this visit above all a time of *fruitful evangelization and prayerful celebration of our unity in faith and love*.

I am also grateful to the people of *other Churches and creeds* and to *all Americans* of good will who have accompanied me, in person or through the media, as I travelled from city to city. A particular word of thanks goes to *the men and women of the media* for their constant and diligent assistance in bringing my message to the people, and in helping me to reach millions of those with whom otherwise I would have had no contact. Most importantly, I am grateful to *all those who*

supported me by their prayers, especially the elderly and the sick, who are so dear to the heart of Jesus Christ.

As I leave, I express my gratitude to God also for what he is accomplishing in your midst. With the words of Saint Paul, I too can say with confident assurance "that *he who has begun the good work in you will carry it through to completion*, right up to the day of Christ Jesus" (*Phil. 1, 6-7*). And so I am confident too that America will be ever more conscious of her responsibility for justice and peace in the world. As a nation that has received so much, she is called to continued generosity and service towards others.

2. As I go, I take with me vivid memories of a dynamic nation, a warm and welcoming people, a Church abundantly blessed with a rich blend of cultural traditions. I depart with admiration for the ecumenical spirit that breathes strongly throughout this land, for the genuine enthusiasm of your young people, and for the hopeful aspirations of your most recent immigrants. I take with me an unforgettable memory of a *country that God has richly blessed from the beginning until now*.

America the beautiful! So you sing in one of your national songs. Yes, America, you are beautiful indeed, and blessed in so many ways:

- in your majestic mountains and fertile plains;
- in the goodness and sacrifice hidden in your teeming cities and expanding suburbs;
- in your genius for invention and for splendid progress;
- in the power that you use for service and in the wealth that you share with others;
- in what you give to your own, and in what you do for others beyond your borders;
- in how you serve, and in how you keep alive the flame of hope in many hearts;
- in your quest for excellence and in your desire to right all wrongs.

Yes, America, all this belongs to you. But *your greatest beauty and your richest blessing is found in the human person*: in each man, woman and child, in every immigrant, in every native-born son and daughter.

3. For this reason, America, your deepest identity and truest character as a nation is revealed in the position you take towards the human person. *The ultimate test of your greatness in the way you treat every human being, but especially the weakest and most defenceless ones*.

The best traditions of your land presume respect for those who cannot defend themselves. If you want equal justice for all, and true freedom and lasting peace, then, America, defend life! All the great causes that are yours today will have meaning only *to the extent that you guarantee the right to life and protect the human person*:

- feeding the poor and welcoming refugees;

- reinforcing the social fabric of this nation;
- promoting the true advancement of women;
- securing the rights of minorities;
- pursuing disarmament, while guaranteeing legitimate defence; all this will succeed only if respect for life and its protection by the law is granted to every human being *from conception until natural death*.

Every human person - no matter how vulnerable or helpless, no matter how young or how old, no matter how healthy, handicapped or sick, no matter how useful or productive for society - is a being of inestimable worth created in the image and likeness of God. This is the dignity of America, the reason she exists, the condition for her survival-yes, the ultimate test of her greatness: to respect every human person, especially the weakest and most defenceless ones, those as yet unborn.

With these sentiments of love and hope for America, I now say goodbye in words that I spoke once before: "Today, therefore, my final prayer is this: that God will bless America, so that she may increasingly become - and truly be - and long remain one Nation, *under God*, indivisible. With liberty and justice for all" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *A Vasintoniano aëronavium portu, Romam profecturi extrema salutatio civilibus religiosisque Auctoritatibus facta*, die 7 oct. 1979: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, II, 2 (1979) 705).

May God bless you all.
God bless America!

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