



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO AMERICA

**MEETING WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES
OF ALL THE GENERATIONS OF THE CENTURY**

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

Azteca Stadium

Monday, 25 January 1999

(First Part)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. In a short time, an important century and millennium for the history of the Church and humanity will be drawing to a close. In this significant period you are called to become newly aware of having been entrusted with a rich human and religious tradition. It is your task to transmit this heritage of values to the new generations in order to nourish their vitality and hope, making them share in the Christian faith that shaped their past and must mark their future.

A thousand years ago, in the year 999 of our era, the fury of those who worshiped a violent god, calling themselves his representatives, did away with Quetzalcóatl, the prophet-king of the Toltecs, because he was against using force to settle human conflicts. As he neared death, he clutched in his hands a cross which symbolized for him and his followers the agreement of all ideas in the search for harmony. He passed on these lofty teachings to his people: "Good will always prevail over evil". "Man is the centre of all creation". "Weapons will never be companions of the word; it is the word that dispels the storm-clouds, so that we may be filled with divine light" (cf. Raúl Horta, *El Humanismo en el Nuevo Mundo*, chap. II). In these and in other teachings of Quetzalcóatl we can see a "preparation for the Gospel" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 16), which many of your ancestors would have the joy of accepting 500 years later.

2. This millennium has seen the meeting of two worlds, marking a new path in humanity's history. For you it is the millennium of the encounter with Christ, of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Tepeyac, of the first evangelization and the Church's consequent establishment in America.

The last five centuries have left a decisive mark on the identity and destiny of the continent: 500 years of shared history, interwoven with the indigenous peoples and those who came from Europe, later joined by those from Africa and Asia. Together with the characteristic phenomenon of intermingling it became evident that all races have equal dignity and a right to their own culture. Throughout this long and complex process, Christ has been constantly present on the American people's journey, giving them his Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary as their own Mother, whom you love so deeply.

3. As suggested by the motto Mexico has chosen to welcome the Pope for the fourth time, "A millennium is born: Let us reaffirm our faith", the forthcoming new era must lead to a strengthening of America's faith in Jesus Christ. It is this faith, lived each day by many believers, which will motivate and inspire the necessary measures to overcome the deficiencies in the community's social progress, especially that of the rural and indigenous peoples; to overcome the corruption that affects so many institutions and citizens; to eliminate drug trafficking, which is based on a lack of values, on the desire for easy money and on the inexperience of young people; to end the violence that sets brothers and social classes against one another, leading to bloodshed. Only faith in Christ can give rise to a culture opposed to selfishness and death. Parents and grandparents present here: it is your task to pass on firmly-rooted convictions of faith, Christian practices and sound moral norms to the new generation; the teachings of the last Council will help you in this.

4. The Second Vatican Council, as a Gospel response to the world's recent development and the beginning of a new Christian springtime (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 18), has been providential for the 20th century. This century has seen two world wars and the horror of concentration camps, persecutions and massacres, but it has also witnessed developments full of hope for the future, such as the birth of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I am therefore pleased to note the benefits that have come from accepting the Council's teachings, such as the deep sense of communion and brotherhood among the Bishops of America in close union with the Pope, evidenced at the celebration of the Synod which I solemnly closed yesterday, the increasing commitment of the laity to building the Church, the growth of movements which promote the holiness of life and the apostolate of all her members, the increase in vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life, which can be seen in various places, including Mexico.

Four generations are present here and I ask them: is it true that the world we live in is both great

and fragile, sublime but sometimes confused? Is this world advanced in some respects but backward in so many others? Yet this world - our world - needs Christ, the Lord of history, who sheds light on the mystery of man and guides him by his Gospel in the search for solutions to the chief problems of our time (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 10).

Since some of the powerful have turned their backs on Christ, the century now ending is impotently witnessing the death from starvation of thousands of human beings, although, paradoxically, agricultural and industrial production are on the rise; it no longer promotes moral values, which have been gradually eroded by phenomena such as drugs, corruption, unbridled consumerism and widespread hedonism; defenceless, it beholds the growing gap between poor indebted countries and others which are powerful and affluent; it continues to ignore the intrinsic perversion and terrible consequences of the "culture of death"; it promotes ecology, but ignores the fact that any attack on nature is deeply rooted in moral disorder and man's contempt for man.

5. America, land of Christ and Mary! You have an important role in building the new world that the Second Vatican Council wanted to promote. You must be committed to making the truth prevail over the many forms of deceit, so that good may triumph over evil, justice over injustice, honesty over corruption. Accept without reservation the Council's vision of the human being, created by God and redeemed by Jesus Christ. In this way, you will attain the full truth of moral values despite the illusion of temporary, precarious and subjective certitudes.

We who form the Church - Bishops, priests, consecrated persons and laity - feel committed to the saving message of Christ. By following his example, we do not want to impose his message but to offer it in full freedom, remembering that he alone has the words of eternal life, and trusting fully in the Holy Spirit's power and action in the depths of the human heart.

May you, Catholics of all the generations of the 20th century, be messengers and witnesses of the Church's great hope in all the circumstances to which God has sent you as seeds of faith, hope and boundless love for all your brothers and sisters!

(Second Part)

Last year I heard they were calling me "Carioca", but now you are telling me: "You're Mexican".

6. Next year we will celebrate the 2,000th year since "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). The Son of God made man taught everyone to be authentic men and women, feeling compassion for the multitudes he found straying like sheep without a shepherd, and giving his life for our salvation. His presence and action continue on earth through the Church, his Mystical Body. This is why every Christian is called to proclaim Christ, to witness to him and to

make him present everywhere in the various cultures and ages of history.

7. Evangelization, an essential task, the mission and vocation of the Church (cf. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 14), stems precisely from faith in the Word, who is the true light that enlightens every man coming into this world (cf. Jn 1:9). I say to you who have joined the Pope today, here or through the media: take responsibility for spreading the light you have received!

A century and millennium will soon be ending in which, despite so many conflicts, the value of the person has been promoted over social, political and economic structures. In this regard, the new evangelization also contains the Church's response to this important change of historical perspective. Each of you, by your own way of life and Christian commitment, must bear witness throughout America and the world that Christ is the true champion of human dignity and of its freedom.

8. As followers of Christ, we long for unity and not division, for brotherhood and not antagonism, for peace and not war to prevail in the coming century. This is also an essential goal of the new evangelization. As the Church's children, you must work so that the coming global society is not spiritually impoverished or heir to the mistakes of the century now ending.

To do this, it is necessary to say yes to God and to engage with him in building a new society where the family can be an environment of generosity and love, where reason enters calmly into dialogue with faith, and freedom fosters a society marked by solidarity and participation. In fact, anyone who follows the Gospel as a guide and norm of life cannot remain passive, but must share and spread Christ's light, even to the point of self-sacrifice.

9. The new evangelization will be a seed of hope for the new millennium if you, today's Catholics, make the effort to transmit to future generations the precious legacy of human and Christian values which have given meaning to your life. As men and women who, with the passing years, have accumulated valuable lessons of life, it is your role to ensure that the new generations receive a sound Christian formation during their intellectual and cultural training, to prevent the powerful progress from closing them to the transcendent. Lastly, always present yourselves as tireless promoters of dialogue and peace in the face of the predominance of might over right, and of indifference to the tragedies of hunger and disease afflicting large numbers of the population.

10. For your part, young people and children who look to tomorrow with hearts full of hope, you are called to be the artisans of history and evangelization now and in the future. A sign that you did not receive this rich Christian and human heritage in vain will be your dedicated striving for holiness, both in the life of the families that many of you will start in a few years' time, and in the gift of yourselves to God in the priesthood or the consecrated life, if this is your calling.

The Second Vatican Council has reminded us that all the baptized, and not only a few privileged

individuals, are called to incarnate Christ's life in their own lives, to have his very sentiments and to trust fully in the Father's will, giving themselves without reserve to his saving plan, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, in tireless generosity and love for their brethren, especially the most disadvantaged. The ideal which Jesus Christ holds up to you and teaches by his life is indeed exalted, but it is the only one that can give full meaning to life. Therefore beware of the false prophets who offer other goals that at times may seem more attractive but are always deceptive. Do not go along with them at all!

11. Christians of the 21st century also have an inexhaustible source of inspiration in the ecclesial communities of the early centuries. Those who lived with Jesus or listened directly to the Apostles' testimony, felt their lives transformed and flooded with a new light. However, they had to live their faith in an indifferent and even hostile world. To make the truth of the Gospel penetrate, to transform the numerous convictions and customs that denigrated human dignity, required huge sacrifices, firm perseverance and great creativity. Only with unshakeable faith in Christ, constantly nourished by prayer, by listening to God's word and by regular participation in the Eucharist, were the first Christian generations able to overcome those difficulties and make human history fruitful with the newness of the Gospel, even many times by shedding their blood. In the new era now unfolding, the era of informatics and powerful means of communication, on the verge of an increasingly fluid globalization of economic and social relations, dear young people, you and your contemporaries face the challenge of opening the minds and hearts of humanity to the newness of Christ and the graciousness of God. Only in this way can we avoid the risk of a world and a history without soul, overproud of its technological achievements, but lacking hope and deep meaning.

12. You young people of Mexico and America must ensure that the world, which will be in your hands one day, is oriented to God and that its political, scientific, financial and cultural institutions are put at the authentic service of the human being, without racial or social distinction. Thanks to you, our future society must know, by the joy which comes from fully living your Christian faith, that in God alone can the human heart find peace and complete happiness. As good Christians, you must also be exemplary citizens capable of working together with people of good will to transform nations and regions with the power of Jesus' truth and a hope that never wavers in the face of adversity. Try to put St Paul's advice into practice: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21).

13. As a reminder and a pledge, I leave you Jesus' last words, which illumine the future and nourish our hope: "And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20).

In the Lord's name, go with determination and evangelize your surroundings, so that they may become more human, fraternal and united, more respectful of the nature entrusted to us. Share your faith and ideals of life with all the peoples of the continent, not by useless confrontations, but by the witness of your life. Show that Christ has the words of eternal life which can save people of yesterday, today and tomorrow. Reveal to your brothers and sisters the divine and human face of

Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last of all creation and all history, even of the history you are writing with your own lives.

Before reciting the Our Father at the end of the meeting, the Holy Father recalled the victims of the earthquake which had struck Colombia earlier that day, and he prayed for the eternal repose of the deceased:

I learned today of the numerous victims and many injured caused by an earthquake in Colombia. Let us show our love in solidarity with these brothers and sisters who are suffering at this time. From here I would like to encourage those who are helping the earthquake victims. Let us pray for the eternal repose of all who have lost their lives.