



The Holy See

PELLEGRINAGGIO APOSTOLICO IN PORTOGALLO

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**INCONTRO COL GENERALE ANTÓNIO RAMALHO EANES,
PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA PORTOGHESE**

SALUTO DEL SANTO PADRE GIOVANNI PAOLO II*

Lisbona

Mercoledì, 12 maggio 1982

Your Excellency, General Antonio Ramalho Panes. President of the Portuguese Republic.

1. I am very grateful to Your Excellency for the very fine hospitality with which you have just received me. And at this point I would like to renew the expression of my gratitude also for your respectful presence at the airport upon my arrival in Portugal.

Though Your Excellency, my gratitude goes out to all the dear people of Portugal and to her illustrious representatives for all the work and willingness shown so that this journey that I am now making to the "Land of Holy Mary might become a reality. As an example of this willingness I would like to mention the personal invitations extended to me, especially by Your Excellency: these were added to the wishes of the Episcopate of Portugal, which have been expressed for a long time by the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon, Mons. Antonio Ribeiro, as President of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference.

All the touching esteem expressed in these invitations and gestures of homage, with which the Successor of St Peter, in the See of Rome is honoured, are certainly not exclusively directed to my person: the homage goes to the Shepherd of the Universal Church who visits the land of Portugal in these robes; in the last analysis the homage goes to the Lord and Master of the same Church, Jesus Christ, whose place in the history of man is beyond all doubt.

And so here I am on a pastoral visit to Portugal, and above all on a pilgrimage to Fatima; and I am glad at the same time to be able to satisfy the requirements of friendship, of the ancient friendship that exists between this beloved country and the Apostolic See of Rome.

2. In fact, the bonds between Portugal and the Roman See of Peter are very ancient. That moment, at the time of the Roman presence in the Iberian Peninsula, when the blessed name of Christ resounded for the first time in this homeland of the Lusitanian People, is lost in the mists of time. And from then onwards, with the Christian faith, the peoples of Lusitania also accepted the Church, which the same Jesus Christ wished to build on the «rock» of Peter, to whom he entrusted the responsibility of teaching and ministering to all God's people, scattered over the face of the earth. Gradually, organic relations were established to express and support the love and fidelity to the one Catholic Church of the faithful of the dioceses of these regions, from Braga to Os sonoba, within the confines of the present territory, from Minho to the Algarve.

And in retrospect I believe I can say that the love of the faithful of these lands for the Roman Pontiff was exceeded only by their famous devotion to Christ the Redeemer– in the mysteries of the passion and the Eucharist – and to the Madonna, who, invoked in one of her most beautiful prerogatives, the Immaculate Conception, was chosen and acclaimed «Queen» and Patroness of Portugal (1). These devotions constantly encouraged the worship of God and solid adherence to other religious duties, which left profound traces in the history and life of the beloved people of Portugal.

As is well known, wherever she is, the Church wishes to be able to serve the personal and social vocations of her members, who are at the same time members of established political communities. In fact, by reason of the spiritual nature of her mission and competence, she cannot be confused with society or connected with any political system, but wants to be a sign everywhere of the transcendence of the human person. She does this by teaching the truth of the Gospel and illuminating with her doctrine and the testimony of the faithful all the areas of human activity (2).

Thus the relations of the portuguese nation with the See of Peter, which, with the passage of time, took the form of recognition and duties, as is well known (just three years ago I had the pleasure of participating in the commemoration of the eighth centenary of the first of these acknowledgements, in the Church of Saint Anthony of the Portuguese in Rome) are situated in this perspective. Conscious of the duty dictated by her very mission to help men in their search for an answer to the eternal questions regarding the meaning of this life and the future one, and the relation between the two – here also the Church has always sought to be the companion of man, in her desire to render him a service.

It is in this light that we should see the journey made together by the Church and Portugal, with her friendly relations with the See of Rome, which merited from my predecessor Benedict XIV the

title of «the most faithful nation» in the person of her kings (3).

3. The history of Portugal, as is the case with other peoples, is not without alternating light and shadow, in the different aspects of the life of its population, but beneath all this many things have remained in order, things which have not changed and which cannot change. The Church – as is well known believes in fact that «the key, the centre and the end of all human history are to be found in Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and always» (4). And from a global point of view, the majority of the Portuguese population, in its fundamental historical choices, has chosen Christ, Christ the Redeemer of mankind, as witnessed by the five shields of the national flag and the Cross on her ships in her folklore.

The Church always puts forward Christ, who is situated in time and space, therefore truly and intimately linked with the human race and its history, in the desire to serve man with his dignity and the opening of his spirit, in the full truth of his existence, of his personal being and, at the same time, of his communitarian and social being (5).

Among the trials that emerge in the history and life of Portugal, the phenomenon of migration, beginning in the distant past, is one of the most striking. Many of her children have left their own land, in the past as in the present, with painful separations and moments of uncertainty, to seek elsewhere the chance to improve their life. The loss of these sons and daughters, which without doubt constituted a loss for this country, was normally a gain for the lands where they settled.

Of those who left here, apart from those who did so for reasons of survival or for other motives, there were also a select number, enamoured of the ideal and passionately devoted to Christ – the Portuguese missionaries – who set sail from here to go and establish Christianity in different continents. And an historical monument to this which still exists – I have been told –is the papiar Christiano, a synonym for «Portuguese speech» in certain regions of South West Asia; a very significant list of names which allows us easily to identify as Catholics or of Catholic background many men and women all over the world christianized by the Portuguese.

These brave missionaries, servants of Christ and of his Church and the glory of Portugal, with their ardour and their generous and total dedication, brought spiritual help to so many brothers in the world, not hesitating to contribute to their development, helping them to progress in the satisfaction of their basic needs, and to cultivate the dignity of the human person. Thus, in proclaiming the Good News of salvation, they offered them a human service and this is also why they merit our admiration and recognition.

4. The Portuguese who remained did not live through their history without difficulty. But in the unfolding of their history they showed rare qualities of courage, the capacity to resist in enduring great trials and dangers, and perseverance, that all demonstrate the moral fibre and spiritual strength which, in the present as in the past, must sustain and motivate the children of this nation

in their present struggles, heads held high, looking with dignity and hope to the future. With the responsible participation and generous contribution of all to the general good, the elimination of poverty, help for those who are set aside or uprooted, the prospect of work for all – especially for the young people of this land – the structuring of living conditions, assistance and security in the social and economic fields, health, education, work, the family and the elderly should continue to be a definite collective goal of a people conscious of the characteristic values of its community and proud to demonstrate them in its political and social life. The historical awareness and Christian faith of the Portuguese, together with the need for an honest relationship with the truth, as conditions necessary for authentic freedom, should also continue to convince them, certainly today, that without excluding a legitimate, healthy and responsible pluralism, only love is constructive; and that the key to the solution of their problems and to their Prosperity is a Christian and human sense of values, joined in justice and harmonized in solidarity, brotherhood and the love of one's brothers.

5. I pray that, according to her true historical destiny, Portugal, with her charism of universality and easy integration, may continue to be a force for understanding among peoples, especially those with whom , she has a strong cultural affinity.

The portuguese emigrants and missionaries went to all parts of the world and wherever they went the name of their country was loved and honoured. May that continue to be the source of human and spiritual inspiration for her position in the world and preserve for Portugal the high esteem of her most glorious days.

The «Casa Lusitana» still has a noble mission. And would to God that her inheritance of Christian faith, preserved and cultivated through the centuries, in the real expressions of its identity, which made this «beautiful homeland, by the sea, of a heroic people, with the grace of God, sing» – as one of your poets said – may continue to be a constant encouragement to this noble country to reach a state of well-being which expresses the happiness of all the Portuguese, in a climate of active harmony, prosperity and peace!

May I thank His Excellency once more for his friendly and distinguished welcome; and upon all the beloved people of Portugal who have chosen him as their representative, I impart the most bountiful blessings of the Almighty and Merciful God.

NOTES

1) Cf. Auto da aclamação de N. Senhora da Conceição como Padroeira de Portugal, pelas Cortes de Lisboa em 1646.

2) Cf. Vatican Council II, Const. Gaudium et Spes, 76.

3) Cf. Apostolic Brief of 23 12 1748: Bullarum Romanum, Venetiis Tip. Gatti, 1778, t. III, p. 1.

4) Vatican Council II, Const. Gaudium et Spes, 10.

5) Cf. Enc. Redemptor Hominis, 14.

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