



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr Teófilo de Figueiredo Almeida Silva,
NEW AMBASSADOR OF CAPE VERDE TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 12 December 1996

Mr Ambassador,

I have great pleasure in welcoming you to the Vatican today and in receiving the Letters of Credence appointing you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Cape Verde to the Holy See, one more in the series of your country's representatives, with the distinguished mission of maintaining and deepening the relations between the Apostolic See and your nation, the object of my pastoral concern and affection.

I would first like to convey my gratitude for your words of esteem, expressing the many sentiments of closeness and adherence to the See of Peter which dwell in the hearts of the large majority of your fellow citizens, as I could experience during my Apostolic Visit in 1990. I would also like in some way to recall the pleasant visit which Mr António Mascarenhas Monteiro, the President of the Republic, recently made me. I take this important occasion in order to warmly greet, through Your Excellency, the people of Cape Verde, committed to building a society that corresponds to their aspirations. I ask God to bless the efforts of all who are engaged in building an ever more dignified and prosperous country.

As Your Excellency knows, the Church's mission is essentially religious; her diplomatic relations with the different nations aim to respond to the pressing need, at the international level, to affirm and strengthen the unity of the human family. The Second Vatican Council teaches that "the encouragement of unity is in harmony with the deepest nature of the Church's mission" (Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 42), and that the Church is and must be "a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men" (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 1).

In fulfilling this mission, the Holy See continually appeals for a more just world order, inspired by true and necessary solidarity, in order to sustain the development of the countries which are endeavouring to overcome the difficulties resulting from the adverse conditions which have beset them and which are ruining your country, as in the case of the drought you mentioned. At the recent World Food Summit, sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Association,

Governments expressed the clear political will to join hands to overcome the serious emergencies which place the survival of entire peoples at risk. May the international community, in the name of that spirit of the one great family which is humanity, honour the commitments made and so give rise to a fruitful exchange of gifts in which the most underprivileged nations are given due attention, or better, priority and which should, ultimately, result in the well-being of all! Truly “it is in the interest of the rich countries to choose the path of solidarity, for only in this way can lasting peace and harmony for humanity be ensured” (Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, 114).

I highlighted the above-mentioned family spirit, which will bring about calmer and better days for humanity, in my address to the General Assembly of the United Nations last year: “The idea of ‘family’ immediately evokes something more than simple functional relations or a mere convergence of interests. The family is by nature a community based on mutual trust, mutual support and sincere respect. In an authentic family the strong do not dominate; instead, the weaker members, because of their very weakness, are all the more welcomed and served. Raised to the level of the ‘family of nations’, these sentiments ought to be, even before law itself, the very fabric of relations between peoples” (*Address*, 5 October 1995, n. 14; *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, 11 October 1995, p. 10), so that the international community may aspire, with well-founded hope, to see healed the wounds still bleeding in the very flesh of countless human beings.

Mr Ambassador, passing from the context of the “family of nations” to the families of the nation, I recall how at the Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops which took place in 1994, it was stressed that on this continent, “in particular, the family is the foundation on which the social edifice is built” (Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, 80), specifying that it has “vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself. Thus, far from being closed in on itself, the family is by nature and vocation open to other families and to society, and undertakes its social role” (*Ibid.*, 85). This is the reason why the Church in Cape Verde, as elsewhere in the world, has the defence of the family so much at heart: by safeguarding the basic cell of society, she helps to prevent its disintegration. I can assure you that Cape Verde’s Catholics continue to be determined to collaborate in the nation’s well-being, despite the vandalistic attacks on religious symbols which are unfortunately perpetrated by anonymous hands.

Moreover, when it is acknowledged as you have rightly done, Mr Ambassador, that your country “has grown, ever supported by a culture structured on the basis of Christian principles and values”, one can hope that the model of the family founded on the unity and indissolubility of marriage may be given priority as a guarantee of stability and solidarity for the nation’s social life. The Second Vatican Council made this appeal: “Civil authority should consider it a sacred duty to acknowledge the true nature of marriage and the family, to protect and foster them, to safeguard public morality and to promote domestic prosperity” (Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 52). A juridical order which appropriately safeguards the family will have positive repercussions on the common good, enabling this institution to continue to be the nucleus on which society is founded.

Mr Ambassador,

At the end of this meeting, I offer you my cordial wishes that your lofty mission which starts today may bring you much satisfaction in its fulfilment. I commend to almighty God your person and your dear ones, the President of the Republic

and all who are at the service of the beloved people of Cape Verde whom Your Excellency has the honour to represent to the Holy See, from this moment.

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