



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO CROATIA (OCTOBER 2-4, 1998)

SPEECH AT DEPARTURE CEREMONY *Mr President,*

Representatives of the Government,

Dear Brother Bishops,

Brothers and Sisters, 1. I have reached the end of my Pastoral Visit to your beautiful country. The moment of departure has arrived. I give thanks to God for these three days spent in Croatia, in the exercise of my Petrine ministry. I am grateful to the Churches of Zagreb and Split-Makarska which have welcomed me, and to the whole Church which is in this country for the affection it has shown me. I thank the President of the Republic, the Head of the Government and the civil and military authorities, who have spared no efforts to ensure that this Visit would proceed in the best possible way. Many people have worked to bring this about and I thank all of them. Before leaving your country and departing from you, I would like to address a heartfelt greeting to everyone: to families, parishes, Dioceses, religious communities, movements and ecclesial associations. The images of so many of the faithful of all ages, and especially the young, are imprinted in my memory: in Zagreb, Marija Bistrica, Znanj in Split and in Solin: crowds of people who have demonstrated their faith and rejoiced in full harmony of minds and hearts. 2. In Croatia, I have been able to meet a Church which is full of life, rich in enthusiasm and energy, despite the adversities and abuses of power which she has suffered; a Church which is looking for new forms of witness to Christ and his Gospel, to respond fully to the challenges of the present moment. Countless are those in these lands who, from the earliest centuries, have borne witness to Christ in their daily lives; many have even faced the test of martyrdom for the sake of Christ. You are the heirs of this glorious multitude of saints, the majority of whom are known to God alone. I have seen your joy when I proclaimed Blessed Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac: the honour accorded to him redounds in some way on all of you. It is right that you should be proud of this. But, it is also right that you should feel committed to being worthy of this heritage, which honours you but also challenges you. May this rich patrimony of faith, and that of other European peoples, become the common heritage of the entire Continent, so that the peoples living in it may rediscover in Christianity that spiritual unity and impulse which in past centuries inspired a true flourishing of works of thought and artistic masterpieces of absolute value for the whole of humanity. 3. My stay among you has enabled me to experience at first hand the recovery achieved in the past few years. I have seen a society which desires to build its present and future on solid democratic foundations, in complete fidelity to its own history, which is permeated by Christianity, in order to take its rightful place in the assembly of the other European Nations. With joy I recognize that yours is a country which, having recovered freedom and overcome the sad vicissitudes of war, is now reconstructing itself and renewing itself materially and spiritually with keen determination. I call

on men and women of good will throughout the world not to forget the tragedies suffered by these peoples in the course of history, and especially in our own century. May there be no lack of the concrete and generous help which individuals and families need in order to live in freedom and equality, with the dignity of active members of the human family. Europe has set out on a new stage of its journey towards unity and growth. In order for joy to be complete, no one must be forgotten on the path which leads to the common European house. For her own part, Croatia must show great patience, wisdom, a willingness to make sacrifices and generous solidarity in order to overcome definitively the present post-war phase and attain the noble goals to which she aspires. Much has already been achieved and we now see the results. The difficulties which remain should discourage no one.⁴ Your Nation is endowed with the resources needed to overcome adversity and you especially, citizens of Croatia, possess the talents which are indispensable in order to meet the challenges of the present moment. With the commitment of everyone, it will be possible to carry forward the difficult process of making society and its civil institutions more democratic. Democracy comes at a high price; the money to pay for it is minted from the noble metal of honesty, reasonableness, respect for others, the spirit of sacrifice, and patience. To claim that it can be bought with a different currency is to run the risk of bankruptcy. After long years of dictatorship and the terrible experiences of violence which the peoples of this region have undergone, it is now necessary to make every effort to construct a democracy based on the moral values inscribed in the very nature of the human being. By assisting the efforts of the social classes and political groupings, the Church will not fail to make her own specific contribution, especially by offering her social doctrine and making available her own structures for the education of the younger generation. She exhorts the faithful to work together in an effective way, as they have done from the beginning, in the present process of developing democratic institutions in the vast spheres of the social, cultural, political and economic life of the country, thus promoting the harmonious development of the whole of Croatian society.⁵ Dear Brothers and Sisters, I return to Rome carrying in my heart many beautiful impressions of this Visit. They will accompany me in the prayers I shall offer on your behalf, for the sick and the old, for your children and for all your People. May God grant Croatia peace, harmony and a persevering commitment to the common good! Dear Croatian people, may God bless you! May the Virgin Mary, *Advocata Croatiae, fidelissima Mater*, watch over your present and future! I entrust to her all your plans for freedom and progress in solidarity; all your hopes and your commitment to human and religious values. God bless Croatia!