



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF PANAMA TO THE HOLY SEE**

Saturday, 4 December 1999

Madam Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to receive the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Panama to the Holy See, and I am deeply grateful for your kind words on this solemn occasion, which also gives me the pleasant opportunity to greet you and to offer you my warmest welcome.

I would also like to express my particular appreciation of the sentiments of closeness and devotion of your President, Mrs Mireya Moscoso, and of your country's Government, which you have conveyed to me, and in turn I ask you to reciprocate with my respectful greetings and gratitude, as well as my best wishes for the peace and well-being of all the beloved Panamanian people.

2. The cordiality which characterizes this meeting reflects the good relations that exist between Panama and the Holy See, as well as the good understanding and close collaboration between the public authorities and the Church in Panama. I am pleased to note that the new Government has expressed its intention to continue and to increase these relations so that, while respecting the autonomy and difference of their tasks and respective areas of competence, the ultimate goal of both the public authorities and the Church will be the welfare of individuals and the common good of society.

In fact, a people's authentic progress is not only achieved by technical means, however fitting and necessary they may be, but also by instilling in them a spirit which gives meaning to life and consistency to society through responsible public participation and a deep sense of solidarity. The Church, whose first Diocese on the American continent was in Panama, namely "Santa María la Antigua del Darien", has contributed to this for a long time by preaching Christ's Gospel to its

people, accompanying them in the process of integral education, promoting the highest values, defending their personal dignity and being close to them in their difficulties, especially to the most unfortunate members of society. Motivated by fidelity to the mission she has received from Christ, the Church continues and will continue to help Panamanians face the challenges awaiting them in the new millennium, and will encourage them to work together towards a better future for all.

3. This future begins with an event of great importance for Panama, when sovereignty over the canal which bears its name, together with the adjacent territory, will be returned to it in a few days. This event will entail great juridical, practical, economic and political consequences, but it will also be, as you stated in your address, a symbolic reaffirmation of the historical and geographical identity of your country, which is called to play an important role of communication and linkage among the world's peoples.

All this can be seen as an invitation for Panama to distinguish herself as a welcoming people, open to dialogue and having deep Christian roots. This is why special care must be taken, after regaining sovereignty over the territory, to prevent outside interests or pressures from diverting the benefits which this magnificent historical opportunity can bring to all citizens, by encouraging the development of projects aimed at eradicating the poverty suffered by part of the population, at ever greater respect for the dignity of the various ethnic groups, at improving education, at speeding up the exercise of judicial power and at making the situation of prisoners more just and humane in order to facilitate their reintegration into society and, lastly, at providing the necessary means for the integral development of all Panamanians.

4. You have the honour, Madam Ambassador, of beginning your diplomatic mission in Rome on the eve of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which is a very important event for Christians throughout the world and in which the Church has great hopes of renewal and reconciliation. I ardently desire that it will be for Panama too a favourable occasion for promoting its spiritual future, and, as I said in my Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, "an opportunity for reflecting on other challenges of our time, such as the difficulties of dialogue between different cultures and the problems connected with respect for women's rights and the promotion of the family and marriage" (n. 51).

5. With these hopes, I once again welcome you and your distinguished family. I offer you my best wishes for the success of the mission you are now beginning as your country's representative and from which we await abundant fruits for the spiritual and material good of the Panamanian people. I am thinking in particular of the women and men who strive to live each day with dignity and are proud of being able to help build a better future for their country. I ask our Mother in heaven to protect her Panamanian children and to fill them with the necessary courage to advance on the paths of solidarity and peace.

Madam Ambassador, I ask you to express my sentiments of appreciation and closeness to the

Panamanian authorities and people, to whom I impart a cordial Blessing.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English 2000 n.2 p.4.*

© Copyright 1999 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana