



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

**WELCOME CEREMONY
AT THE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT OF BRATISLAVA**

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

Thursday, 11 September 2003 Mr President of the Republic,

Distinguished Authorities,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

*Dear Brothers and Sisters!*1. I give thanks to the Lord for allowing me to set foot today on the beloved Slovakian soil *for the third time*. I come as a pilgrim of the Gospel to bring *greetings of peace and hope* to all. My respectful greeting goes to you, Mr President of the Republic. I thank you for the noble words with which, in the name of all the people of this country, you have welcomed me. With you I also greet the civil and military authorities, thankful for their wide-ranging commitment in organising this apostolic journey of mine. I embrace with affection my Brother Bishops, with the President of the Episcopal Conference, the Most Reverend František Tondra, Bishop of Spiš, and the Venerable Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec, Bishop of Nitra. Finally I extend a cordial greeting in the Lord to all the men and women who live, work, suffer and hope in this Land of Slovakia, and I invoke upon each and every one of you the very special blessings of the Most High God.2. The civil and religious history of Slovakia has been written with the contribution of heroic and dynamic witnesses of the Gospel. My wish is to pay grateful tribute to them all. I am thinking of course of the glorious brothers from Thessalonika, *Saints Cyril and Methodius*, the Apostles of the Slavic peoples. I also remember *all who generously served God and their fellow men and women*, who have distinguished these regions with their virtues. To these we now add Bishop *Vasil' Hopko* and Sister *Zdenka Schelingová*. Next Sunday I will have the joy of enrolling them among the Blessed. All of them have left behind a rich harvest of good in the Slovakian cultural heritage. The history of this Land indeed can be seen as a history of faithfulness to Christ and to his Church.3. In the near future your country will become a full member of the European Community. Dearly beloved, bring to the construction of Europe's new identity the contribution of your rich Christian tradition! *Do not be satisfied with the sole quest for economic advantages*. Great affluence in fact can also generate great poverty. Only by building up, not without sacrifices and difficulties, a society *respectful of human life* in all its expressions, that *promotes the family* as a place of reciprocal love and growth of persons, that *seeks the common good* and is attentive to the needs of the weakest, will there be guarantees of a future

based on solid foundations and rich in goods for all.⁴ In the days to come my pilgrimage will lead me to the Dioceses of Bratislava-Trnava, Banská Bystrica and Roňava. But my desire at this moment is to embrace - at least in spirit - *all the sons and daughters of Slovakia*, together with the representatives of national minorities and of other religions. I would like to be able to meet and speak with each and every one of you, to call on every family, to visit your beautiful land, and to meet all the ecclesial communities of this beloved Nation. Please know that the Pope is thinking of each one of you and is praying for you all. May God bless Slovakia and give you all peace, prosperity and harmony based on fraternity and mutual understanding.

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