



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II**

**TO THE PILGRIMS FROM SLOVAKIA** *Saturday, 14 February 2004*

*Venerable Brothers,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. It is a joy to receive you and I address my most cordial welcome to you all. I first greet and thank the Bishops of the Slovak Bishops' Conference who have organized this national pilgrimage. I greet in particular Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec and Cardinal Jozef Tomko, as well as Bishop Frantisek Tondra whom I thank for his courteous words conveying the sentiments of all. I express my deep gratitude to the President of the Republic for his presence and his warm greeting.

2. During my Pontificate, divine Providence has granted me to visit Slovakia three times: in 1990, shortly after the fall of the Communist regime; in 1995; and last year, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic and the creation of the Slovak Bishops' Conference.

Today you have come to reciprocate the Visit I was able to pay you five months ago of which I treasure vivid memories. You planned your stay in Rome to coincide with the Feast of Sts Cyril and Methodius, Patrons of Slovakia and Co-Patrons of Europe. This happy liturgical context makes it possible to highlight the ancient bonds of communion that bind the Church in your Country to the Bishop of Rome. At the same time, the witness of these two great Apostles to the Slavs is a strong appeal to rediscover the roots of your people's European identity, roots you share with the other nations of the Continent.

3. I have the joy of welcoming you to St Peter's tomb. You have come here to strengthen the profession of the faith that is your people's most precious and imperishable heritage.

I ask you to keep this faith whole, indeed, to nourish it with prayer, an appropriate catechesis and continuing formation. It should not be hidden but proclaimed and witnessed to with courage and a

consistent ecumenical and missionary balance. This is what the Brothers Cyril and Methodius teach as founders of the long line of saints who sprang up in the course of your history. Firmly anchored to the Cross of Christ, they put into practice what the divine Teacher preached to his disciples from the outset: "*You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world*" (Mt 5: 13, 14).

4. For you, being "salt" and "light" means making the Gospel truth shine out in the personal and community decisions you make every day. It means keeping intact the spiritual heritage of Sts Cyril and Methodius, opposing the widespread tendency to conform to similar or standardized models.

Slovakia and Europe are being enriched with many cultural contributions in the third millennium, but it would be most harmful to forget that Christianity made a crucial contribution to the formation of the Continent. Dear Slovaks, make your own important contribution by interpreting those human and spiritual values that have given your history meaning. It is indispensable that these ideals which you have lived consistently continue to guide a free and supportive Europe that can harmonize its different cultural and religious traditions.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, as I once again express to you my gratitude for your visit, in taking my leave may I entrust to you Christ's invitation to Simon Peter: "*Duc in altum* - Put out into the deep" (Lk 5: 4). I hear this exhortation constantly echoing in my soul. This morning I address it to you.

5. Pilgrim People of God in Slovakia, put out into the deep and sail on, across the ocean of this new millennium, fixing your gaze on Christ. May Mary, Virgin Mother of the Redeemer, be the Star that guides you on your voyage. May your revered Patrons, Sts Cyril and Methodius, protect you, together with numerous heroes of the faith, some of whom paid for fidelity to the Gospel with their blood.

With these sentiments, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to your loved ones and to the entire Slovak People.