



## PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

SPEECH BY M. JACQUES CHIRAC, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC,

TO MARK THE VISIT BY HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN-PAUL II

(Tarbes, 14 August 2004)

Most Holy Father,

It is a pleasure and an honour for my wife, for me, for all French men and women, to bid You the warmest of welcomes to Tarbes today. France is delighted to welcome You once again for this, your second pilgrimage to Lourdes since 1983.

Most Holy Father, You have already made seven visits to our country, this ancient land of Christianity, in particular for the World Youth Day celebrations that brought together over one million young people in Paris in August 1997. French men and women treasure lasting memories of this.

Last year, in Rome, You celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of Your pontificate in the company of men and women who came from all continents to express their admiration and affection for You and pass on their heartfelt wishes.

This year, You have chosen to return to Lourdes, the embodiment of the memory of a French Saint, Bernadette Soubirous, a woman whose love and faith gave hope to all those in need and who is a source of comfort and inspiration for Catholics the world over.

Each and every one of us is aware of the importance of Your visit to these exceptional places where so much courage, devotion and solidarity is seen.

Pilgrim of pilgrims, Your presence, Your solicitude and Your example will rekindle the fervour of all those men and women who, often suffering and ailing, come to pray at Lourdes, this temple of faith and hope.

Tomorrow, You will celebrate holy communion, which, in this place and on this day devoted to the Virgin Mary, will have a profound significance.

Since, transcending individual beliefs and convictions, a universal consciousness is gradually emerging. Slowly but, we may hope, surely, the peoples, Nations and States of the world are realizing that defending the weak, vulnerable and poor is a duty and a moral obligation that transcends all borders.

France and the Holy See are united in this struggle for a world that puts people first at all times.



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A struggle for peace, for relations between States to be governed by law, challenging the policy of fait accompli and urging dialogue between cultures as an antidote to violence and the rejection of the Other.

A struggle for freedom, the recognition of the equal dignity of all, men and women, and the refusal of all forms of discrimination, oppression, racism and hatred, a struggle particularly necessary and urgent in the face of the rise of fanaticism and intolerance.

A struggle for solidarity, justice and social progress to put an end to the outrages of mass poverty, illiteracy and hunger in a world that has never been so rich.

A struggle, too, for nature, a gift bestowed on us that we must treat with respect and care if we are to guarantee our future and the future of generations to come.

We are driven by the ideal of humanity united by universal values and capable by that same token of respecting and celebrating the diversity of its histories and its cultures; humanity all the more assured in its quest for knowledge and progress since it abides by the ethics of responsibility and the requisites of solidarity.

The indefatigable pilgrim that You are embodies these struggles, as he embodies courageousness and spirit and this strength that has made you, Most Holy Father, a universal shepherd and a man of peace.

May Your stay in this land of France bring serenity and hope to all those men and women who hear You and follow You.

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