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MESSAGE FOR WORLD TOURISM DAY 2011

'TOURISM UNITES CULTURES'

On September 27, we celebrate the World Tourism Day, promoted by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), which has enjoyed even from its very first celebration in 1980 the support of the Holy See.

The theme of this year, "Tourism Linking Cultures," wishes to highlight the importance that traveling has in the meeting of the different cultures of the world, especially in our present day world where more than ninety million people travel internationally, favored thus by modern means of communication and lower associated costs.

In this way, tourism presents itself as "breaking down barriers across cultures and fostering tolerance, respect and mutual understanding. In our often divided world, these values represent the stepping stones towards a more peaceful future."

With a broad concept of culture that includes; besides the history or artistic and ethnographic patrimony; the lifestyles, relationships, beliefs, and values, we not only affirm the existence of cultural diversity, but in line with the magisterium of the Church, we value it as indeed positive. Thus "once diversity has been accepted as a positive factor, it is necessary to ensure that people not only accept the existence of other cultures," as Benedict XVI affirms, "but also desire to be enriched by them," welcoming the true, good, and beautiful therein.

To achieve this objective, tourism extends to us all its possibilities. The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism affirms that "when practiced with a sufficiently open mind, it is an irreplaceable factor of self-education, mutual tolerance and for learning about the legitimate differences between peoples and cultures and their diversity." This, by its very nature, can favor meeting as well as dialogue, as it places one in contact with other places, traditions, manners of living, and other forms of seeing the world and conceiving history. For all of these reasons, tourism is certainly a privileged event.

However, regarding dialogue, the first condition that is required is that of knowing how to listen, to want to be questioned by the other, desiring to discover the message within each monument, cultural manifestation, all of this being done with respect, without

prejudice or exclusion, and avoiding biased readings. It is thus equally important "to know how to welcome" as to "know how to travel." This means that tourism should be organized with respect for the peculiar nature, laws, and customs of the receiving countries, all of which the tourists themselves should be acquainted with before their departure so as to better understand the place they are going to visit. That being said, also those communities receiving tourists and professional agents should know the lifestyles and expectations of the tourists that visit them.

Given the fact that every culture contains in itself certain limits, the meeting of different cultures permits an enrichment of each one's own reality. This is evident in the affirmation of Blessed John Paul II that "the 'difference' which some find so threatening can, through respectful dialogue, become the source of a deeper understanding of the mystery of human existence."

One objective of our pastoral care of tourism will certainly be to educate and prepare Christians so that these cultural encounters are productive in their travels and not lost opportunities, but contrarily, that they would truly serve as a personal enrichment, helping to know the other, and to know one's self.

In this dialogue that produces the fruit of linking cultures, we are convinced that the Church has much to contribute. "In the cultural arena too," teaches Benedict XVI, "Christianity must offer to all a most powerful force of renewal and exaltation, that is, the Love of God who makes himself human love." The cultural patrimony of the Church is indeed immense, understood in the broad sense that we previously explained which arises from the experience of faith, of the encounter between culture and the Gospel, as the fruit of the profound religious experience of the Christian community. Certainly, the works of art and historical memory have an enormous potential to evangelize, in as much as they are placed in the context of the *via pulchritudinis*, the way of beauty, which is "a privileged and fascinating path on which to approach the Mystery of God."

It must be an objective priority of our pastoral care of tourism to show the true meaning of this cultural heritage, born from faith and for the glory of God. Along these lines, the words of Blessed John Paul II directed toward workers in the pastoral care of tourism still resound: "You are cooperating in forming an outlook which is also a type of reawakening of the soul to the things of the spirit by helping visitors to get back to the sources of faith which built these edifices, and by making visible the Church of living stones which Christian communities are made of." It is therefore important that we present this patrimony in its authenticity, illustrating its true religious nature, placing it in the liturgical context in which and for which it was born.

As we are conscious that the Church "exists in order to evangelize," we must always ask ourselves: How can we welcome people in holy places so that they come to better know and love the Lord? How can we facilitate an encounter between God and each one of the people that are there welcomed? It must be highlighted that, in the first place, the

importance of an adequate welcome, "should take into consideration the specific characteristics of each group and each individual, the yearnings of their hearts and their authentic spiritual needs" and is manifested by a variety of elements: from the simple details to the personal availability to listen, to the accompaniment throughout the duration of the stay.

In this regard, and with the objective of promoting this intercultural dialogue and taking advantage of our cultural patrimony at the service of evangelization, it is fitting to adopt a series of concrete pastoral initiatives. All of these must be integrated into a broad program of interpretation that, together with historical-cultural information, illustrates in a clear and accessible way the original and profound religious meaning of these cultural manifestations, using for this modern and attractive means, and taking advantage of the personal and technological resources that are at our disposal.

Among these concrete proposals there is the elaboration of the idea of touristic travel offering visitation to the places that are most important in the religious and cultural patrimony of the diocese. Along with this, broad time periods of open hours should be favored, thus making available an adequate welcoming. In this way, the spiritual and cultural formation of tourist guides is important, and thus one can see the value in the possibility of creating organizations of catholic tour guides. With this, the elaboration of "local publications in the guise of tourist guides, Web pages, or specialized journals on patrimony, with the pedagogical aim of highlighting the soul, inspiration and message of works, scientific analysis is thereby put at the service of a deeper understanding of the work."

We cannot allow ourselves to view the tourist visit as simply a step in pre-evangelization, but on the contrary, we must see it as a platform to realize the clear and explicit announcement of Jesus Christ.

I would like now also to take advantage of this opportunity to officially announce the celebration of VII World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Tourism, that will take place in Cancun (Mexico) the week of April 23-27, 2012. This event, organized by our pontifical council in collaboration with the Mexican Episcopal Conference and the Prelature of Cancun-Chetumal, will certainly be an important opportunity to continue the consideration of concrete proposals that the pastoral care of tourism requires in the present times.

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