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A LETTER TO TOURISTS AND HOLIDAYMAKERS

RESPECTING AND APPRECIATING THE BEAUTY OF CREATION

Dear holidaymakers, welcome to our Diocese. Some of you are already familiar to us as you regularly visit our country, some of you are doing it for the first time. Welcome everybody. The Church of Orihuela-Alicante receives you with joy and affection.

Nowadays, more than ever before, the concern and burden we generally go through, increasingly, cause tourism demand to head for nature resorts. And I presume that a lot of you come here looking for the rest of our country and sea, and the warmth of its people after a laborious year, which may have been tense and tiring for some of you. And you have made the right choice, because if other places may have their own charm, the sun of our province, its beaches and mountains, its cities with their heritage, the warm welcome and the excellence of its people, are increasingly a tourist attraction and a good therapy for tired visitors.

Together with my affection I would like to offer you some interesting meditation, as tourism and holidays are, apart from your well-deserved rest, a special opportunity to meet or rediscover God through His creation.

Nature and biological diversity refer to God the creator, who is present in his creation, "For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator." (Wisdom 13,5), "...for he is the creator of beauty, and he created them." (Wisdom 13,3). It is revealed in the Old Testament. Also St. Paul in the Letter to the Romans states that "...for his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made." (Romans 1, 20). This is also expressed by the First Vatican Council when it is stated that "God, the source and end of all things,

can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason..." (Vatican I, s. III, c. 2).

In the same line, the recent Magisterium has not ceased to proclaim that in their search for God, the human being finds out in creation some ways to approach the Mystery. The world, in its diversity, is presented to the human gaze as a trace of God, as a place where his provident, redeeming creative power is revealed. That's why tourism, and especially during the holiday period, when approaching to creation in all its variety and richness, can be used to promote or enhance the religious experience. Thus John Paul II, in his message for World Day of Tourism, at the beginning of this century, encouraged the pilgrims and tourists to have eyes that can "see" reality, without remaining on the surface of things. And he added: "I firmly hope that tourism will always be an occasion for fruitful encounters: the encounter with God, who shows us his love and his providence in Creation and human achievement; the encounter with oneself, in the silence of reflection and interior listening; the encounter with others, to foster peaceful harmony among individuals and peoples". However, this assumes the sincere search for God and a deep, reflective look by each individual.

Pope Benedict XVI also emphasized the beauty of creation (*Via pulchritudinis*) as a means of access to God, adding another element to consider: that tourists should strive to respect and appreciate the beauty of creation, and that "when we care for creation, we see that God, through creation, cares for us "(JMP 2010). Therefore, not only tourism cannot be exempted from their responsibility in protecting biodiversity, but on the contrary they must play an active role in it.

A great model to imitate is St. Francis of Assisi, who sees in each element of the universe the almighty action of God and that's why he blesses the Creator, in his famous *Canticle of the Creatures*.

I also want to express to all tourist pastoral agents in the diocese and tourists, the desire to foster moments of prayer and reflection in nature resorts in addition to those performed in temples. Due to the geographic and climatic characteristics of our eastern land, there are usually excursions, camping, rural visits, processions, etc. I'd like to remind you that every moment and space, travel or leisure, are places to meet and worship the Creator.

Finally, I cannot forget those who do not have holidays so that others can have theirs. There are so many people who generously strive to serve us well and work in the tourism sector with the noble intention of making a living. I'd like to remind all of them the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ: "... Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. " (Mt 25, 40), the happy reward is awaiting them.

To conclude I commend you all to the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is the Mighty Mother who fulfils the wishes and remedies the needs of their children. Invoke her intensely. May Our Lady bless you and preserve you.

Happy holidays!

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