

**Remarks of Cardinal Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States of America, at the Reception to mark the 11<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the election of Pope Francis as Bishop of Rome, Apostolic Nunciature, March 11, 2024**

My dear friends,

I am delighted to welcome each of you here for the annual reception on the anniversary of the election of Pope Francis. Eleven years ago, the Holy Father was elected at the Conclave of the Cardinals to lead the Church as Supreme Pontiff and Bishop of Rome.

I am especially pleased to welcome my fellow members of the College of Cardinals: Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington, Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark and Cardinal Donald Wuerl, emeritus of Washington. In addition, it is a great joy to welcome the members of the Administrative Committee of the Conference of Bishops, who represent the Bishops of each region of the United States, led this evening by their Vice-President, Archbishop William Lori, of Baltimore.

We are also happy to welcome many of our friends from the Diplomatic Corps: to their Excellencies, the Ambassadors, I offer a warm welcome and a word of appreciation for your presence this evening. In addition, we have a very robust representation of the multilateral sector. I welcome especially the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Luis Almagro Lemes, together with the many Ambassadors accredited to the OAS, who have accepted the invitation of Msgr Juan Antonio Cruz Serrano, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the OAS, and my co-hosts for this Reception. I welcome too those representing the various entities related to the OAS, as well as those from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

We are also pleased to have with us this evening, members of Congress, together with representatives of various government agencies; in particular Mr Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor. I offer a warm word of welcome to our friends from the State Department, whose collaboration we always appreciate.

I have the additional joy to welcome all those representing the many and varied realities of this vibrant local Church – from the fields of education, health, administration, advocacy, charity and evangelization. I am personally very happy to see you here, for you represent the Church in action and the Church in mission. It is the dearest hope of the Apostolic Nunciature to support and encourage these essential activities of the local Church. I pay tribute to the priests, religious men and women and committed lay people who are present this evening, who contribute so much to put into action the perennial mission of the Church, to teach and give witness to Christ.

I welcome too our friends from the various Christian churches, as well as those representing other religious communities & traditions.

It is good also to see so many of the friends of the Nunciature here this evening; past and present staff members and those who collaborate in the work and life of the Nunciature in so many ways.

I wanted to acknowledge each of you present this evening: through you, the international community is present, as is the life of this great nation and the many and varied faces of the Catholic Church in the U.S. I think it important to take note of this, since we are all united in our wish to mark the anniversary of the Pope's election and to honor his unique mission as the visible center of unity in the Church, but also as a voice of moral leadership in the international community and a point of reference for all people of good will in this country.

Last year, on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the election of Pope Francis, I offered a reflection on the first decade of the Holy Father's ministry. I do not intend to return to that theme this evening. Shall we wait for the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary?!

Rather, I simply want to thank you for your presence and for taking the time to mark this anniversary celebration. The figure of the Pope is an entirely special one in the world today. And the Apostolic Nunciature is an extension of his mission and ministry. I, together with my collaborators, have the joy to try to make present in these United States the office of Peter's successor. We try to bring to Catholics a sense of the Pope's closeness and concern for the Church in this country. To Catholics and non-Catholics alike, we also try to offer the

perspective of Pope Francis on the many trying dilemmas of our time, to which he speaks with a particular clarity and charity.

Speaking to the diplomatic corps to the Holy See in January of this year, Pope Francis remarked: “it is the responsibility of the Holy See within the international community to be a prophetic voice and to appeal to consciences.” It is, I think, this aspect of the mission of the Pope that makes his voice so vital in our time. It is why his words often resonate as clearly outside the family of the Church as within.

We are in need of a voice like that of Pope Francis, which will always call us to a higher vision, and remind us of the timeless virtues so essential to any civilization worthy of the name.

In that same discourse to the diplomats, the Pope focused on the foundational importance of peace in our world. He remarked: “Peace is primarily a gift of God, for it is he who has left us *his* peace (cf. Jn 14:27). Yet it is also a responsibility incumbent upon all of us: ‘Blessed are the peacemakers’ (Mt 5:9). To strive for peace; a word so simple, yet so demanding and rich in meaning.”

As we gather this evening to honor Pope Francis and to give thanks for his ministry, now in its second decade, perhaps we can make those words our own. Whether we come from the international organizations, the world of government or diplomacy, or are here as leaders or active members in the Church, we can all unite around the desire for peace and work towards realizing it.

With these thoughts in our minds, I ask you then to join me in a toast:

For the health and well-being of the Government and people of the United States of America!

*(glasses are raised)*

For Our Holy Father, Pope Francis on the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his election!

*(glasses are raised)*

Thank you, my dear friends, for your attention.