

# *Pope Francis thanks the Cuban people for their example of collaboration*

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Vatican City, January 14 (RHC)-- On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of John Paul II's visit to Cuba, Pope Francis sent a message to the Cuban people on Saturday, in which he expresses his "appreciation for their example of collaboration and mutual help that unites them."

In the message, which recalls the historic apostolic trip of his predecessor made between January 21 and 25, 1998, the first by a Supreme Pontiff to that Latin American nation, Francis exhorted Cubans to

"continue building the future of that nation with hope and determination".

With "the spirit that characterizes them, open, welcoming and supportive, continue to walk together with hope, knowing that always, and particularly in the midst of adversity and suffering, Jesus and his Blessed Mother accompany you," the Bishop of Rome said.

He recalled the words that John Paul II addressed then to the young Cubans, when he asked them to "face with fortitude and temperance, with justice and prudence the great challenges of the present moment" and pointed out that "the person is defined principally by his responsibility towards others and towards history".

Pope Francis said that "as a sign of my closeness and communion with the beloved Cuban people, who have great writers and artists, I would like to recall some words of Father Varela, which express the need to be rooted in the good and the fruitfulness of this effort".

He quoted that Cuban priest of the early 19th century, a relevant patriot declared venerable by Pope Benedict XVI in April 2012, whose beatification process is underway at the Vatican, who said that "after the tree is rooted, it will soon extend its branches, and in its shade will rest virtue".

"This tree full of vitality can well represent the man who has rooted his trust in the Lord," added the Supreme Pontiff.

As the prophet Jeremiah said, "he is like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots toward the stream; it does not fear when the heat comes and its foliage remains luxuriant; it does not fret in a year of drought and never ceases to bear fruit," he added.

Pope Francis hoped that the words of John Paul II during his apostolic trip to Cuba "resound with force in the present, and give a new impulse to continue building with hope and determination the future of that nation".

Finally, he invited the people of that country "to continue to delve into their own roots with courage and responsibility, and to continue to bear fruit united in faith, hope and charity" and wished that "Jesus bless the Cuban people and Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre watch over and accompany them".

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