

On Cuba

When he visited Cuba last year Pope John Paul II issued a plea that Cuba should be more open to the world, and the world to Cuba. His own visit helped people everywhere to perceive another dimension to the Cuban situation, a dimension I had seen several weeks before when, with Catholic Relief Services representatives, I helped bring medications and vitamins to Cuba for distribution by Cuban Caritas.

It is the dimension of changes gradually taking place, changes for the better, with some space and recognition finally being given to the place of faith in people's lives. In this context, we can hope for other changes also to take place, and to encourage this to happen by allowing people to reach out to people. We can and should encourage this, based on our belief that every human being is a child of God, regardless of the political complexion of the local government.

For several years Peter Angelos and the Orioles baseball team have been looking for ways to reach out to the Cubans and their love for baseball. In spite of all kinds of obstacles, they have finally reached their goal; they deserve congratulations for their good will and perseverance. Today, more than ever perhaps, we need to reach out and to encourage people to talk to people. We rejoice that there are young people involved, not only talking with other youth, but also playing with them and, on Palm Sunday, even praying with them. The young students from St. Ignatius Academy, Baltimore, represented our community well in these past few days.

We can understand the pain and the sadness of some who have suffered through the years and even recently, but we must rejoice that doors long closed are beginning to open a little.

Several weeks ago bishops from the U.S. and other parts of our hemisphere met in Havana to follow up on the Synod for America, which looked at the challenges and opportunities facing our hemisphere. They wondered about Cuba and its isolation from its nearest large neighbor, and hoped for the day when more and more openness would bring the blessings of better understanding and greater exchange between Cuba and the rest of the world, including the United States. Such developments should also foster genuine progress in human rights and freedom for

all the people of Cuba. God grant that this may happen.