



## **Christmas Message from His Majesty the King**

24 December 2019

Good evening.

Five years ago I had the honour, for the first time as King, of wishing you a merry Christmas and sending you a message of affection and good wishes for the new year. It was also a message of commitment to my desire to serve Spain faithfully, responsibly, and with total dedication.

So I thank you for once again letting me share a few minutes with you on this very special evening. The first thing I want to do, of course, along with the Queen, Princess Leonor and Princess Sofía, is to wish you every happiness and peace over these days when we gather with our families and loved ones.

And at this time we especially want to remember and send our love to the families and people most affected, and who have suffered the most, even tragically, from the floods in Spain in the last few days, as many more were over the course of the year.

They say, and it's true, that these are not easy times for the world. Maybe they never really are, but more than ever these times are full of uncertainty, of rapid and deep-reaching changes in many spheres, causing concern and alarm in society, both in Spain and beyond: the new technological and digital era, the future of the European Union, the flow of migration, inequality between men and women in the workplace, and how we deal with climate change and sustainability, are all pressing questions which are already strongly influencing our lives.

And on top of all that, low employment - especially among our young people - and the economic difficulties of many families, especially the most vulnerable, continue to be the main worries in our country. It is a fact around the world, and here too, that while there is growth and development, the economic crisis has made inequality more extreme.

So the consequences for our own social cohesion of the technological revolution I just mentioned, the loss of trust in institutions among many citizens, and of course Catalonia, are other serious concerns for Spain.

Now, after the General Election of 10 November, we find ourselves immersed in the constitutional procedure by which our lower house of Parliament, the Congress of Deputies, approves or rejects the proposed candidate for Prime Minister. In accordance with our Constitution, it is up to the Congress of Deputies to make the decision they believe will best serve the interests of all the people of Spain.

I said at the beginning that these are not easy times; but I also believe that this is exactly why, more than ever, we must have faith in ourselves and in Spain, which has always made it through when we face the future with responsibility, generosity and rigour; with determination, but also calmly and thoughtfully. And we have plenty of reasons to have faith.

Progress in a country depends largely on the character of its citizens, the strength of its society, and how well its government functions.

On 19 June I had the great honour of awarding the Order of Civil Merit to 41 citizens from all over Spain. Women and men, old and young, with diverse origins and conditions, who are a true example of dignity and an accurate reflection of the best of our society.

I could appreciate in person their generosity and spirit of solidarity, their capacity for self-sacrifice and overcoming obstacles, their desire to help others and value the common good more highly than their own interests, their courage in adverse situations; qualities which are an expression of the civic virtues which inspire the vast majority of our citizens.

I particularly want to emphasise that these are the attitudes which have shaped the personality of the Spanish people and have moulded our modern society over the last forty years of democracy.

A society which has undergone a transformation at the deepest level, more than ever before in our history; which lives according to the values and attitudes we share with other free and democratic societies; which is and feels deeply European and Ibero-American; and which is not isolated but open to the world and fully integrated in global society.

A society which has faced and overcome very difficult situations with admirable serenity and fortitude, showing great resilience and maturity.

And a society which is enterprising and generous, with great creativity and indisputable leadership in many fields, such as engineering, medicine, science, culture, sport and business.

We live in a Social and Democratic State of Law which enables us to live together in freedom and which has made Spain a modern country, with essential social and public services such as education and healthcare; which is equipped with an extensive network of next-generation transport and communications; and which guarantees the safety and security of its citizens in a way few can claim to do.

It is also a nation in a privileged position in international relations, thanks to its aspiration to universality, its history and its culture. The people who visit us, invest here or decide to live among us are the proof of all of this - they recognise it and value it.

So we have built a great deal together, and we have come a long way. And we can be very proud of the values which inspire our citizens, of the energy, vitality and dynamism of our society, and the solidity of our State. And I believe it is important to say it, not because of any misplaced self-esteem but because this is a proven reality which we should value.

Given this reality, we must not be drawn into extremism: neither into a self-satisfaction which silences our shortcomings and mistakes, nor a destructive self-criticism which negates the great civic, social and political heritage we have accumulated.

There is undoubtedly much left for us to do, to improve and renew. For this, we must have a clear and objective awareness of our strengths and weaknesses, and we must also have a full and realistic view of what is happening and will happen in the world.

Everything we have achieved - as I have commented on other occasions - did not just happen of its own accord. It is ultimately because over the years millions of Spaniards, thanks to our Constitution, have shared the

same values which are the foundation of how we live together, our great shared projects, our feelings and ideas.

The first of these values I want to highlight here is the desire for harmony which thanks to the responsibility, affection, generosity, dialogue and respect shared by people of very different ideologies, has torn down the walls of intolerance, bitterness and misunderstanding which have marked many episodes in our history.

Second, the willingness to understand and integrate our differences as part of respect for our Constitution, which recognises the territorial diversity which defines us and preserves the unity that gives us strength.

And third and last, defending and encouraging solidarity, equality and freedom as the core principles of our society, making tolerance and respect the outward manifestations of the finest civic spirit of our shared lives.

These values have been with us for many years, and are part of the identity of today's Spain; but we cannot take them for granted or forget how fragile they are, and so we must do everything possible to strengthen them and stop them being eroded.

Time does not stand still and Spain cannot remain frozen or fail to keep up with events. It has to keep to its path, without isolating itself as it did in some past eras - it must keep looking forward and outward to find its way among the great social, scientific and educational changes the future will bring.

The challenges facing us are not easy, but as we have so often in our recent history, I am sure we can overcome them. Let's believe in ourselves, in our society; let's believe in Spain and remain united in the democratic values we share to resolve our problems; without divisions or confrontations, which only erode our peaceful coexistence and impoverish our future.

We have great potential as a country. Let's think big. Let's move forwards with ambition. All of us together. We know how to do it, and we know the way...

With this encouragement and this spirit, the Queen, our daughters and I wish you all – especially those of you who are far away, working and safeguarding our country, or who are providing essential services at these hours – a very happy Christmas and all the best for the New Year 2020.

Eguberri on. Bon Nadal. Boas festas.