



The Holy See

***LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.B. IGNACE PIERRE VIII ABDEL-AHAD
PATRIARCH OF THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH FOR SYRIAN CATHOLICS***

*To His Beatitude Ignace Pierre VIII Abdel-Ahad
Patriarch of the Church of Antioch for Syrian Catholics*

I write to you, Your Beatitude, to present to you my warmest greeting in the Lord and to thank you with all my heart for the welcome you gave to my personal Envoy, Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, who visited Jerusalem for a brotherly reflection on the current situation of the beloved Syro-Catholic Church of Antioch.

Cardinal Etchegaray told me about the meeting he had with you, Your Beatitude. He was edified by your friendliness and by your serene observations, by the keen sense of responsibility you have shown in order to encourage the return to full unity in the Patriarchal Synod and by your fruitful exercise of pastoral care for the good of the sons and daughters of the Syro-Catholic Church, in their motherland and in the diaspora. The Cardinal then presented the letter by which, Your Beatitude, certainly after mature reflection in prolonged prayer before the Lord, you presented your resignation from your patriarchal office.

I deeply appreciate, Venerable Brother, this act of ecclesial love and your anxiety above all for the spiritual progress of the faithful through episcopal harmony. I see it, moreover, as an admirable confirmation of your pastoral zeal. At this special moment in your life, I warmly desire to recognize with deep gratitude all the good you have done during your years as Patriarch and in the ecclesial service which you have carried out with devotion and generosity throughout your life.

In the solicitude which the Lord asked of Peter and his successors, after attentive prayer and reflection and after hearing the opinion of my close collaborators, I felt it my duty to accept your resignation for the altruistic pastoral reasons which inspired it.

I would like to tell you that after due consideration of everything and acceding to certain requests made at the Extraordinary Synod convoked at the Vatican from 26 to 28 April 2007, I have decided that the Government of the Syro-Catholic Church will be entrusted, for an appropriate period prior to the election of your Successor, to an Episcopal Committee composed of three members: Archbishop Théophile Georges Kassab of Homs, Hama and Nabk for Syrians; Archbishop Athanase Matti Shaba Matoka of Baghdad for Syrians; and Archbishop Gregorios Elias Tabé of Damascus for Syrians. This Committee will have all the faculties proper to the Patriarch and to the Permanent Synod, in accordance with the norms of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, and will be presided over in turn by each one of its members. Archbishop Théophile Georges Kassab will be given the mandate to govern the Patriarchal Eparchy.

I am sure, Your Beatitude, that you will continue to watch over the beloved Church of Antioch for Syrians as Patriarch emeritus, offering the precious gift of prayer, wise advice and heartfelt sacrifices, as well as the trials which, together with joys, divine Providence does not fail to dispense to good Pastors.

For my part, I assure you of my cordial brotherhood in Christ, in communion with the entire Catholic Church.

Venerable Brother, I pray the Lord to grant you an abundance of serenity, good health and ever greater trust in his holy Will. As I renew to Your Beatitude all my gratitude as well as my cordial esteem, I invoke upon the Pastors and faithful of the Church of Antioch for Syrian Catholics the loving protection of the All Holy Mother of God, and I wholeheartedly impart my Apostolic Blessing to everyone.

From the Vatican, 25 January 2008.

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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