



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
DURING THE INAUGURATION OF A PLAQUE
OF ST GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR
IN THE NORTH COURTYARD OF THE VATICAN BASILICA***

Friday, 22 February 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I address my cordial greeting to all those present. In the first place, I greet Cardinal Angelo Comastri, Archpriest of St Peter's Basilica, and Cardinal Giovanni Lajolo, President of the Governorate. Next I greet Patriarch Nersès Bédros XIX, whom I thank for the kind words with which he has conveyed your common sentiments. I extend my thought to the Archbishops, Bishops and religious personages of the entire Armenian Catholic Church. I also greet the political figures, the delegations and those who have wished to take part in this meaningful ceremony, during which I will bless the toponymic plaque of this courtyard. I gladly welcome today's event to embrace the Apostolic Armenian Church with fraternal love, as I do the Armenian Nation and all Armenians worldwide.

This is certainly a providential circumstance that offers us the opportunity to meet here, next to the tomb of the Apostle Peter, to remember another great Saint to whom, in this moment, this courtyard is dedicated. I am pleased to recall that my venerable Predecessor John Paul II blessed the statue of St Gregory the Illuminator, placed exactly here, just a few months before his death. This great Saint, more than 17 centuries ago, made the Armenians a Christian People, rather, the first People to officially be Christian. The conversion of the Armenians is an event that has profoundly marked Armenian identity, not only on a personal level but for the entire Nation. The term "Illuminator", with which this Saint, so dear to you, is called, highlights the dual function that St Gregory played in the history of Armenia's conversion. "Illuminator", in fact, is a term in Christian usage used to indicate the passage from darkness to the light of Christ. And truly, Christ is precisely the great Illuminator who radiates his light on the entire lives of those who accept him

and follow him faithfully. Now, St Gregory was called the Illuminator precisely because in him the Face of the Saviour was reflected in an extraordinary way. The word "illumination" also bears an ulterior meaning in Armenian usage. It indicates the light that comes from the diffusion of culture through teaching. And this immediately makes one think of those monk-teachers who, following in the footsteps of St Gregory, continued preaching, thus spreading the light of Gospel truth that reveals to man the truth about his own being and unfolds his potential cultural and spiritual wealth.

Dear brothers and sisters, once again, thank you for having taken part in our encounter. Inaugurating the "St Gregory the Illuminator Courtyard", we pray that the Armenian People, through the intercession of their illustrious and worthy son, continue to walk in the ways of faith, allowing themselves to be guided, as done throughout the centuries, by Christ and his Gospel, which has marked their culture in an indelible way. With this hope, which I entrust to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, I impart my Blessing to all.