



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE CONFERENCE
OF LATIN BISHOPS OF THE ARAB REGION
ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 18 January 2008

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

I am pleased to welcome you while you are making your *ad limina* visit, thus strengthening your communion with the Successor of Peter as well as with the local Churches whose Pastors you are. I warmly thank His Beatitude Michel Sabbah, Patriarch of Jerusalem for Latins and President of your Bishops' Conference, for his presentation of the salient features of the Church's life in your Countries. May your pilgrimage to the tomb of the Apostles be an opportunity based on Christ's Person for the spiritual renewal of your communities. The Conference of Latin Bishops of the Arab Region covers a great diversity of situations. Frequently, the faithful who come from numerous countries are grouped together in small communities, in societies composed of a majority of believers of other religions. Tell them how spiritually close the Pope is to them, and that he shares in their anxieties and their hopes. I address my affectionate wishes to everyone so that they may live in serenity and peace.

I would first like to tell you again of the importance I attach to the witness of your local Churches, reminding you of the [Message I addressed to Catholics in the Middle East on 21 December 2006](#), expressing the solidarity of the universal Church (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 10 January 2007, p. 10). In your Region, the endless outbursts of violence, insecurity and hatred make coexistence extremely difficult for everyone, sometimes even giving rise to fear for the life of your communities. This poses a serious challenge to your pastoral service. It impels you to strengthen the faith and sense of brotherhood of the faithful so that all may live with a hope based on the certainty that the Lord never abandons those who turn to him, for he alone is our true hope by virtue of which we can face our present (cf. *Spe Salvi*, n. 1). I warmly invite you to remain close to the people entrusted to your ministry, supporting them in trials and always showing them the

way of authentic fidelity to the Gospel while they do their duty as disciples of Christ. In the difficult situations with which they are familiar, may they all have the strength and courage to live as ardent witnesses of Christ's charity.

It is understandable that circumstances sometimes force Christians to leave their homeland in search of a welcoming country that enables them to live in dignity. Nevertheless, it is essential to give firm support and encouragement to those who choose to remain faithful to their homeland in order to prevent it from becoming an archaeological site deprived of ecclesial life. By developing a solid fraternal life, they will find support in their trials. I therefore give my full support to the initiatives you are taking to contribute to the creation of social and financial conditions that help the Christians who remain in their country, and I appeal to the entire Church to wholeheartedly support these efforts.

The vocation of Christians in your Countries has an essential importance. As artisans of peace and justice, they are a living presence of Christ, who came to reconcile the world with the Father and to gather together all his dispersed children. Thus, authentic communion and serene and respectful collaboration among Catholics of different rites needs to be increasingly affirmed and developed. These are in fact eloquent signs for other Christians and for society as a whole. In addition, Christ's prayer in the Upper Room "*that they may all be one*" is a pressing invitation to strive ceaselessly for unity among Christ's disciples. I am therefore pleased to know that you are placing importance on deepening fraternal relations with the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. They are a fundamental element on the path to unity and a witness borne to Christ "so that the world may believe" (Jn 17: 21). Obstacles on the paths to unity must never extinguish enthusiasm for creating the conditions for a daily dialogue, which is a prelude to unity.

Meeting with members of other religions, Jews and Muslims, is a daily reality for you. In your Countries, the quality of relations between believers acquires a very special meaning, since it is at the same time a witness borne to the one God and a contribution to establishing more brotherly relations between people and between the various components of your societies. A better mutual knowledge is therefore necessary in order to foster ever greater respect for human dignity, the equality of rights and duties of people and renewed attention to the needs of each one, particularly those who are the poorest. Moreover, I firmly hope that authentic religious freedom may be effective everywhere and that the right of each individual to practise his or her religion freely, or to change it, may not be hindered. This is a primordial right of every human being.

Dear Brothers, the support of Christian families who are facing numerous challenges such as religious relativism, materialism and all the threats to the social moral values of the family, must continue to be one of your priorities. I ask you in particular to pursue your efforts to give a sound formation to young people and adults in order to help them strengthen their Christian identity and face courageously and serenely the situations they encounter, with respect for those who do not share their own convictions.

I know of your communities' commitment in the fields of education, health care and social assistance, appreciated by both the Authorities and populations of your Countries. In the conditions in which you live, by developing the values of solidarity, brotherhood and mutual love, you proclaim in your societies God's universal love, especially for the poorest of the poor and the least privileged.

Indeed, "a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love" (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 31c). I also acknowledge the courageous commitment of priests and men and women religious to accompanying your communities in their daily life and witness. Human and spiritual support for them must be an essential concern of their Pastors, whom you are.

Lastly, I would like to express to you once again my closeness to all those in your region who suffer from many forms of violence. You may count on the solidarity of the universal Church.

In addition, I appeal to the wisdom of all people of good will, especially those who hold responsible positions in public life, so that by giving priority to dialogue between all parties, violence may cease, true and lasting peace may be built and relations of solidarity and collaboration may be established. As I entrust each one of your Countries and your Communities to the maternal intercession of Mary, I implore God for the gift of peace for everyone. I wholeheartedly impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing to you, as well as to the priests, men and women religious and all the faithful of your Dioceses.