



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MEMBERS OF THE "ASSEMBLY OF ORGANIZATIONS
FOR AID TO THE EASTERN CHURCHES" (ROACO)**

Clementine Hall

Thursday, 19 June 2008

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Members and Friends of ROACO,*

I am pleased to greet you on the occasion of your second annual assembly. I cordially greet Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, and I thank him for the courteous tribute he has addressed to me as President of ROACO on behalf of all. I extend my greeting to Archbishop Antonio Vegliò, Secretary, to the other Prelates and to the Father Custos of the Holy Land, to the Collaborators of the Dicastery, to the Representatives of the various International Agencies and to the Friends of Bethlehem University.

I would like first of all to thank you for the valuable support you offer to the mission proper to the Bishop of Rome to preside in universal charity. Indeed, you are brought together by love for the Eastern Catholic Churches, to whom I am happy to offer my special encouragement as a confirmation of the consideration they deserve for their faithful bond with the See of Peter. Their ordinary life and their special mission, especially in the ecumenical and interreligious context, should be supported by the entire Catholic Church. The Congregation and ROACO have appropriately made themselves interpreters of the spiritual and material solidarity of all Catholics in order that those communities may live to the full the mystery of the one Church of Christ with fidelity to their own spiritual traditions. I therefore urge you to strengthen this bond of charity so that, in accordance with the recommendation of the Apostle to the Gentiles, those who have an abundance may provide for those in need and that there may be equality in brotherhood (cf. 2 Cor 8: 14-15).

In these days your attention has turned towards the Catholic Communities in Armenia and in Georgia, which were among the first to receive the light of Christ. I greet cordially my brother Bishops who are serving God's people in these areas, and I recall with pleasure our recent meeting on the occasion of their *ad limina* visit. By living humbly and fraternally with other Christian Churches, and by generously serving the poor, these Catholic communities, small though they are, can express in a very practical manner the communion of love proper to the universal Catholic Church. Let me recall what I said on the occasion of the recent visit of His Holiness Karekin II: "If our hearts and minds are open to the Spirit of communion, God can work miracles again in the Church, restoring the bonds of unity".

Dear friends of ROACO, the suffering of Iraqi Christians has long been the centre of your concern. Three months have already passed since the beginning of Holy Week, when our hearts were filled with immense sorrow at the killing of the Archbishop for Chaldeans, Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho, in Mossul. Like many other Iraqi Christians, the Archbishop took up his cross and followed the Lord. In this way he contributed to bringing justice to his tormented land and to the whole world, bearing witness to the truth. He was a man of peace and dialogue. I encourage the aid organizations present to continue their efforts to help Iraqi Christians: those who, often as refugees, live in Iraq and those now in the bordering Countries who must face life in difficult conditions.

With gratitude and relief we followed the recent developments in Lebanon which has rediscovered the way of dialogue and mutual understanding. Once again I express the wish that Lebanon may be able to respond courageously to its vocation to be, for the Middle East and for the whole world, a sign of the effective possibility of a peaceful and constructive coexistence among human beings. Next Sunday, the Christians of Lebanon will have the joy of taking part in Beirut in the Beatification of Venerable Fr Jacques Ghazir Haddad. Touched by the Cross of Jesus, this Capuchin Father made himself close to the sick and the poor and called a great number of young women to serve them. May his witness move the hearts of young Lebanese Christians today so that they in turn may learn the sweetness of an evangelical life at the service of the poor and the lowly, as faithful witnesses of the Catholic faith in the Arab world.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, some of my collaborators in the Roman Curia and, among them, the Cardinal Prefect of your Congregation, recently visited the Latin and Eastern communities of the Holy Land, conveying to them the Pope's affection and concern. I renew the expression of my special gratitude to those who take to heart the cause of these Communities, which is vital for the whole Church. I share with them in their trials and their hopes and I ardently pray that I may be able to visit them in person, as I likewise pray that certain signs of peace, which I hail with immense trust, may soon come to fruition. I appeal to the leaders of nations to see that the long-awaited peace and social stability with respect for the fundamental rights of the person, including real religious freedom are offered to the Middle East and in particular to the Holy Land of Jesus, to Lebanon and to Iraq.

Peace, moreover, is the only way in which to tackle the serious problem of refugees and halt the emigration, especially of Christians, which is deeply wounding the Eastern Churches. I entrust these hopes to Blessed John XXIII, a sincere friend of the East and the Pope of *Pacem in Terris*. And I invoke upon everyone the heavenly intercession of the Queen of Peace, while I cordially impart my Blessing to each one.

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