



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PATRIARCH MAR IGNACE YOUSSEF III YOUNAN
OF ANTIOCH FOR SYRIAN CATHOLICS**

Friday, 19 June 2009

Your Beatitude,

The visit you are making to Rome to venerate the tombs of the Apostles and to meet the Successor of Peter is a cause of great joy to me. Today I renew with sincere and fraternal affection the greeting and kiss of peace in Christ which I exchanged with you following your election as Patriarch of Antioch for Syrians. I thank you for the cordial words you have addressed to me on behalf of your Patriarchal Church. I would also like to express my gratitude to His Beatitude Cardinal Ignace Moussa Daoud, Prefect emeritus of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, and His Beatitude Ignace Pierre Abdel-Ahad, both Patriarchs emeritus of your Church, as well as to all the members of the Episcopal Synod. My gratitude becomes a prayer, particularly for you, Your Beatitude, the new Patriarch, as I accompany you with fraternal solidarity on the first steps of your ecclesial service.

Your Beatitude, divine Providence has made us ministers of Christ and Pastors of his one flock. Let us therefore keep our gaze fixed on him, the Supreme Pastor and Bishop of our souls, certain that he will never abandon us after placing the episcopal *munus* upon our shoulders. It is Christ himself, our Lord, who established the Apostle Peter as the "rock" that supports the spiritual edifice of the Church, asking his disciples to continue in full unity with him, under his sure guidance and that of his Successors. During your more than 1,000 year-old history, communion with the Bishop of Rome has always gone hand in hand with faithfulness to the spiritual tradition of the Christian East, and they both form complementary aspects of the single patrimony of faith that your venerable Church professes. Together, we profess the same Catholic faith, joining our voices to those of the Apostles, Martyrs and Saints who have preceded us, raising to God the Father, in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, our hymn of praise and thanksgiving for the immense riches of this gift that is entrusted to our frail hands.

Dear Brothers of the Syrian Catholic Church, I thought of you in particular during the solemn Eucharistic celebration for the feast of *Corpus Christi*. In the [Homily](#), which I gave in the square outside the Basilica of St John Lateran, I quoted the great Doctor, St Ephrem the Syrian who says: "during the Supper Jesus sacrificed himself; on the Cross he was sacrificed by others". This fine comment enables me to stress the Eucharistic root of the *ecclesiastica communio* which I granted to you, Your Beatitude, at the time of your election by the Synod. Most appropriately, you desired to show with a public sign this very close link which binds you to the Bishop of Rome and to the universal Church, during the Eucharist which you celebrated yesterday at the Basilica of St Mary Major, in which Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the [Congregation for the Eastern Churches](#), my representative with a special mandate, took part. Indeed, the Eucharist is the basis of our various traditions in the unity of the one Spirit and makes them a treasure for the entire People of God. May the celebration of the Eucharist, source and summit of ecclesial life, keep you anchored to the ancient Syriac tradition which claims to have the same language as that of the Lord Jesus and, at the same time, unfolds the horizon of the Church's universality before you! May it make you ever attentive to what the Spirit suggests to the Churches; may it open the eyes of your heart so that you can scrutinize the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel and welcome the expectations and hopes of humanity while responding generously to the needs of those who live in serious conditions of poverty. The Eucharist is the Bread of Life that nourishes your communities and makes them all grow in unity and in charity. May you be able, therefore, to draw from the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity and communion, the strength to defeat the difficulties that your Church has confronted in recent years, in order to find the paths to forgiveness, reconciliation and communion.

Dear Brothers, thank you once again for your visit which enables me to express to you my profound concern for your ecclesial problems. I accompany with pleasure the full resumption of your Synod's functions, and encourage your effort to further unity, understanding and forgiveness, which you must always view as priority duties for building the Church of God. I also pray constantly for peace in the Middle East, and in particular for the Christians who live in the beloved Iraqi nation, whose suffering I present to the Lord every day during the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

Lastly, I would like to share with you another of my major concerns: the spiritual life of priests. On this very day, the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, a day of priestly sanctification, I will have the immense joy of inaugurating the [Year for Priests](#), in memory of the 150th anniversary of the death of the Holy Curé d'Ars. I believe that this special Jubilee Year, which is beginning while the Pauline Year is drawing to a close, will be a fruitful opportunity offered to the whole Church. On Calvary, Mary stood with the Apostle John at the foot of the Cross. Today let us too go in spirit to the Cross together with all your priests, to turn our gaze to the One who was pierced from whom we receive the fullness of all grace. May Mary, Queen of Apostles and Mother of the Church, watch over you, Your Beatitude, over the Synod and over the entire Syrian Catholic Church! As for me, I assure you that I accompany you in my prayers and I impart to you the Apostolic Blessing which I extend to all the faithful of your venerable Church, which exists in several nations of the world.

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