



The Holy See

ECUMENICAL MEETING WITH EASTERN CATHOLIC PATRIARCHS AND MAJOR ARCHBISHOPS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Castel Gandolfo

Saturday, 19 September 2009

Your Eminences,

Your Beatitudes,

Venerable Patriarchs and Major Archbishops,

I cordially greet you all and thank you for accepting the invitation to take part in this meeting. I offer each one of you my fraternal embrace of peace. I greet Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, my Secretary of State, and Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the [Congregation for the Eastern Churches](#), together with the Secretary and the Dicastery's other officials.

Let us thank God for this informal gathering that enables us to listen to the voices of the Churches you serve with admirable self-denial, and to reinforce the bonds of communion that bind them to the Apostolic See. Today's gathering reminds me of the [meeting on 24 April 2005 at the tomb of St Peter](#). At that time, at the beginning of my Pontificate, I wanted to make a pilgrimage in spirit to the heart of the Christian East. Today's meeting is another significant milestone on that pilgrimage, on which it is my intention to continue. You have asked on various occasions for more frequent contact with the Bishop of Rome to strengthen increasingly the communion of your Churches with the Successor of Peter, and to examine together, when necessary, possible topics of special importance. This proposal was also renewed at the last Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches and at the General Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops.

For my part, I feel it is my main duty to encourage the synodality so dear to Eastern ecclesiology and acknowledged with appreciation by the [Second Vatican Ecumenical Council](#). I fully share in

the esteem that the Council showed your Churches in the Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* which my venerable Predecessor John Paul II reaffirmed in particular in his Apostolic Exhortation *Oriente Lumen*. I also share in the hope that the Eastern Catholic Churches will "flourish" in order "to fulfil with new apostolic strength the task entrusted to them", so as to foster "the unity of all Christians, in particular of Eastern Christians, according to the principles laid down in the decree of this holy Council, "On Ecumenism" (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, nn. 1, 24). The ecumenical horizon is often connected with the interreligious outlook. In these two areas the whole Church needs the experience of coexistence, which your Churches have developed since the first Christian millennium.

Venerable Brothers, at this fraternal meeting you will certainly be bringing up the problems that are troubling you and that could find adequate guidance in those who are properly competent. I would like to assure you that you are constantly in my thoughts and in my prayers. I do not forget, in particular, that *appeal for peace* which you put in my hands at the end of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops last October. Moreover, speaking of peace, my thoughts turn in the first place to the regions of the Middle East. I thus take this opportunity to announce the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East which I have convened and which will take place from 10 to 24 October 2010 on the theme: "*The Catholic Church in the Middle East: Communion and witness 'The company of those who believed were of one heart and soul'* (Acts 4: 32)".

While I express the wish that today's meeting will bear the hoped-for fruits, as I invoke the maternal intercession of Mary Most Holy I bless all of you and all the Eastern Catholic Churches.

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