



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE UKRAINIAN BISHOPS ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT
(BISHOPS OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH, BISHOPS OF BYZANTINE RITE
AND
BISHOPS OF THE UKRAINIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE)**

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 20 February 2015*

[Multimedia]

Your Beatitude, Your Excellency, Dear Brother Bishops,

I welcome you to this house which is also your house. And you are well aware of this, because the Successor of Peter has always welcomed with fraternal friendship his Brothers from Ukraine, a country which rightly considers itself the borderland between the heirs of Vladimir and Olga and those of Adalbert and of the great Carolingian missions, as well as of those who invoke the holy Apostles of the Slavs, Cyril and Methodius. And even earlier there are traditions, partially documented, that mention the Apostle Andrew and the two Martyr Popes, St Clement and St Martin. You are welcome here, dear ones!

I have attentively studied your problems, which are not few, as well as your pastoral programmes. Let us entrust them with faith to the Mother of God and ours, who watches over everyone with tender love.

1. Your country is in a situation of serious conflict, which has drawn out for many months and continues to claim numerous innocent victims and cause great suffering throughout the population. In this period, as I have assured you on several occasions, directly and through Cardinal Envoys, that I am especially close to you in my prayers for the victims and for all those who are struck by violence, entreating the Lord that He grant peace soon, and appealing to all parties concerned to implement the accord reached in the Joint Agreement and to respect the principle of international law; in particular, to observe the ceasefire recently signed and to implement all the other

commitments which are conditions to prevent a return to hostilities.

I know the historical events which have marked your land and are present in the collective memory. It is a matter of questions which partly have a political basis, and to which you are not called to offer a direct response; but there are also socio-cultural factors and human tragedies that await your direct and positive contribution.

In such circumstances, what is important is to listen attentively to the voices from the territory, where the people entrusted to your pastoral care live. By listening to your people, you call to mind the values that characterize them: encounter, cooperation, the capacity for settling disputes. Simply said: seeking viable peace. You make this ethical legacy fruitful with the charity, the divine love, that flows from the heart of Christ. I know that, at the local level, you have specific and practical understandings between you, the heirs of two legitimate spiritual traditions — Eastern and Latin — , as well as with other Christians present among you. This, more than a duty, is also an honour which must be recognized.

2. On the national level, you are full citizens of your country, and so you have the right to express, even in the common way, your thought on its future — not in the sense of promoting a concrete political action, but by indicating and re-affirming the values that constitute the cohesive element of Ukraine's society. Thus, persevere in the pursuit of harmony and of the common good, even in the face of grave and complex difficulties.

The Holy See is at your side, in international forums too, to ensure that your rights, your concerns, and the just Gospel values that motivate you are understood. Furthermore, it is studying how to meet the pastoral necessities of those ecclesiastical structures that now also have to face new juridical questions.

3. The ongoing crisis in your country has, understandably, had serious repercussions on the life of families. To this are tied the consequences of that misguided sense of economic freedom that has allowed the formation of a small group of people to become enormously enriched at the expense of the great majority of citizens. The presence of such a phenomenon has, unfortunately, contaminated in varying degrees even the public institutions, and has generated an unjust poverty in a generous and rich land.

Never tire of proposing to your fellow citizens the considerations that faith and pastoral responsibility suggest to you. Upholding the sense of justice and of truth, is a moral duty before it is a political one, and this task is entrusted to your responsibility as Pastors. The more you are free ministers of the Church of Christ, even in your poverty, the more you will become defenders of the family, the poor, the unemployed, the weak, the sick, the elderly pensioners, invalids, displaced persons.

I encourage you to renew, by the grace of God, your pastoral zeal for the proclamation of the Gospel in Ukraine's society, and to support one another with effective cooperation. May you always have the gaze of Christ, who saw the abundance of the harvest and said: pray therefore the Lord that He send labourers into his harvest (cf. Mt 9:37-38). This signifies praying and working for vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life, and at the same time paying attention to the formation of clerics, and of men and women religious, in the service of a more profound and coordinated understanding of the faith within the People of God.

4. I would also like to offer you a further reflection on the relations between you Brothers in the episcopate. I am aware of the complex historical events that weigh on mutual relations, as well as some aspects of a personal nature.

The fact that both Episcopates are Catholic and are Ukrainian is indisputable, even in the diversity of their rites and traditions. It distresses me to hear that there are misunderstandings and injuries. A doctor is needed — and this is Jesus Christ, whom you both serve with generosity and with your whole heart. You are a single body and, as was said to you in the past by St John Paul II, and by Benedict XVI, I, in my turn, urge you to find among yourselves a manner of welcoming one another and of sustaining one another generously in your apostolic labour.

The unity of the Episcopate, as well as giving a good example to the People of God, renders an inestimable service to the Nation, both on the cultural and social planes and, above all, on the spiritual plane. You share the fundamental values and you have in common the most precious treasures: the faith and the People of God. I see, therefore, that the joint meetings of the Bishops of all the Churches *sui iuris* present in Ukraine are of paramount importance. May you always be generous in speaking among yourselves as brothers!

Both as Greek-Catholics and as Latins you are sons of the Catholic Church, which in your land too was for a long time subject to martyrdom. The blood of your witnesses, who intercede for you from Heaven, is a further motive that urges you to true communion of hearts. Unite your forces and support one another, making historical events a motive of sharing and unity. Firmly rooted in the catholic communion, you will also be able to carry forward the ecumenical commitment with faith and patience, so that unity and cooperation between all Christians may grow.

5. I am certain that your decisions, in accord with the Successor of Peter, will be adequate to meet the expectations of your People. I invite you all to govern the communities entrusted to you and to ensure as much as possible the priests and the people of your presence and your closeness.

I am hopeful that you may maintain respectful and fruitful relations with the public Authorities.

I urge you to be attentive and considerate to the poor: they are your wealth. You are Pastors of a flock entrusted to you by Christ: may you be ever more conscious of this, even in your internal

administration, which should be understood as an instrument of communion and of prophecy. In this sense, it is my hope that your intentions and your actions might always be oriented to the general wellbeing of the Churches entrusted to you. In this let the love of your communities guide you, in the same spirit that sustained the Apostles, of whom you are the legitimate successors.

May the memory and the intercession of so many martyrs and saints, whom the Lord Jesus raised up among you, support you in your work. May the maternal protection of the Blessed Virgin reassure you on your journey of encounter with Christ who comes, strengthening your endeavours for communion and collaboration. And, while asking you to pray for me, I affectionately impart a special Apostolic Benediction upon you, upon your Communities, and upon the dear population of Ukraine.