



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE PRAEFECT OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES

To My Venerable Brother

Cardinal Achille Silvestrini

Praefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches I am pleased to send greetings through you to those taking part in the meeting of Bishops and Religious Superiors of the Eastern Catholic Churches in America and Oceania with the Congregation for the Oriental Churches which will take place in Boston on 7 - 12 November 1999. I send a special word of thanks to Cardinal Bernard Law, Archbishop of Boston, whose generous hospitality has made this meeting possible. Following the similar gathering of those responsible for the Eastern Catholic Churches in Europe, held in July 1997, and encouraged by the many fruits born of that meeting, your Congregation saw the usefulness of promoting this new opportunity for joint study and assessment. The purpose of this meeting is to bring the different Eastern Churches together for reflection and common prayer in order that, together with the Congregation, they may recognize the unique characteristics of their presence in America and Oceania and identify paths of commitment for the future. This is a particularly valuable opportunity for the Congregation, since it is in coming together with the leaders of the Churches which it serves and in listening to their needs that your Dicastery is best able to fulfil its role of assisting the Successor of Peter in his own ministry of service. But it is a most precious moment also and above all for the Eastern Churches themselves, because it is through an exchange of experiences and reflections that they will be able to discern the voice of the Spirit who guides the Church on her journey through time. Attentive to the Spirit, the Bishops will be able to identify certain common lines of action in responding to the needs and expectations of their own communities and of the men and women of today. A common strategy is necessary not only if the proclamation of the Gospel is to have greater force and relevance, but also if it is to be a visible sign of the communion of the entire Church in the rich variety of her theological, spiritual, liturgical and canonical patrimony, a patrimony of which all her members partake to their mutual benefit. As you engage in the work of these next few days, the Bishop of Rome — the Church which presides in charity — accompanies you with his prayers. I ask the Lord to grant that the Eastern Catholic Churches, in fidelity to their historical roots and with careful discernment of the social realities in which they live and minister, will have the courage to walk the prophetic path which the Spirit is indicating to the followers of Jesus Christ at the approach of the Third Christian Millennium. Here I would like to recall certain criteria, entrusting them to your joint reflection, which came out of the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops, held in the Vatican from 16 November to 12 December 1997. Although addressing the specific situation in America, these observations apply equally to the Church in Oceania. In my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, I wrote: "Immigration is an almost constant feature of America's history from the

beginning of evangelization to our own day. As part of this complex phenomenon, we see that in recent times different parts of America have welcomed many members of Eastern Churches who, for various reasons, have left their native lands. A first wave of immigration came especially from Western Ukraine; and then it involved the nations of the Middle East” (No. 17). This immigration came to involve all the Eastern Churches, including those of other regions, for example India. Thus it was made “pastorally necessary to establish an Eastern Catholic hierarchy for these Catholic immigrants and their descendants” (ibid.). This context allows us to address an issue which is really the primary object of this meeting: the “diaspora”. I encourage all of you to study this question in depth. The fundamental principle which your reflections must always bear in mind can also be found in that same Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: “The Synod Fathers recalled the norms given by the Second Vatican Council, which recognize that the Eastern Churches 'have the right and the duty to govern themselves according to their own particular discipline', given the mission they have of bearing witness to an ancient doctrinal, liturgical and monastic tradition. Moreover, these Churches have a duty to maintain their own disciplines, since these 'correspond better to the customs of their faithful and are judged to be better suited to provide for the good of souls'” (ibid.). The Eastern Catholic Churches are thus called to maintain a twofold fidelity. First is fidelity to the traditions which have been handed down to them, so that they may in turn hand them on faithfully; useful in this regard are the bonds which unite them to their own Mother Churches. Second is fidelity to the men and women of today with their joys and hopes, their sorrows and pain, their desires and expectations, as they thirst for the truth and the fullness of life that finds its source only in God; this is faithfulness to the continuing search, especially in consumer-oriented societies, for the deeper meaning of life. This twofold fidelity is fidelity to God and to his revelation — shining brightly in the many different traditions which come from the Apostles through the Fathers (cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 1) — and fidelity to man and to his need of God, in the various ways in which this is expressed. In the course of your work together you should not fail to reflect upon the situation created by the presence of Eastern Catholics in territories where the majority of Catholics are of the Latin tradition. As I also noted in my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*: “The universal Church needs a synergy between the particular Churches of East and West so that she may breathe with her two lungs, in the hope of one day doing so in perfect communion between the Catholic Church and the separated Eastern Churches. Therefore, we cannot but rejoice that the Eastern Churches have in recent times taken root in America alongside the Latin Churches present there from the beginning, thus making the catholicity of the Lord’s Church appear more clearly” (No. 17). I therefore remind you of the need to establish and foster an ever deeper relationship of fraternal communion between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church. In fact, there can be no doubt, as I emphasized in *Ecclesia in America*, that “this fraternal cooperation, while offering valuable help to the Eastern Churches of recent foundation in America, will certainly also enrich the particular Churches of the Latin rite with the spiritual heritage of the Eastern Christian tradition” (No. 38). I express the hope that all the leaders of the Eastern Catholic Churches will feel the call to be a concrete sign for the men and women of their own countries and cultures of the love that is the distinguishing mark of Christ’s disciples. I ask you to convey to them my invitation to work together in bringing about that unity which is born of the richness and harmony of variety, so that they may show forth the overflowing richness of God’s revelation and come to identify — along the lines of what is suggested in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* (cf. No. 38) — practical ways of making possible the experience of communion. In this way, all will be able to rejoice in the fruits so far produced and, in genuine concern for others and with enthusiasm, will be able to continue along the path that stretches out before us. This work must find its inspiration in the central mystery of our faith: the Incarnation of the Son of God. It is Jesus Christ, true God and true man, who is the highest expression of fidelity to God and to man. It must be the incarnate Christ — the subject of our contemplation on our pilgrim way to the Holy Year, the Great Jubilee of the

Year 2000 — who guides our steps and enlightens our hearts. Your coming together and the joint celebration of the Divine Liturgy must be an occasion of true encounter with Christ the cornerstone, the foundation of all our projects and plans. Imploring the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who humbly welcomed Christ into her womb and generously gave him to the whole world, I ask the Father to pour out the gift of his Spirit upon all those taking part in this meeting and upon their respective Churches, so that they may shine brightly as a sacrament of the Risen Christ, bringing the younger generations in America and Oceania “to know Jesus Christ, so that they may follow him and find in him their peace and joy” (cf. *Ecclesia in America*, 76). With these sentiments I cordially impart to you and to all the participants in this meeting my Apostolic Blessing. *From the Vatican, 1 November 1999, Solemnity of All Saints* **IOANNES PAULUS II**

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