



The Holy See

SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER

JOHN PAUL II

TO THE PONTIFICAL MISSION FOR PALESTINE

9 December 1999

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brother Bishops and Priests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. With the Eucharistic Liturgy earlier this morning in Saint Peter's Basilica and your audience now with the Successor of Peter, the solemn celebrations marking the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine draw to an end. These celebrations, which began in New York City — where the Mission has its headquarters — and then moved to the Holy Land, Jordan and Libya, thus find a fitting conclusion in the City where the Apostles Peter and Paul bore their final heroic witness to Jesus Christ and to the salvation which he wrought for all mankind.

I thank Cardinal Achille Silevestrini for his kind words of greeting in the name of the Congregation for Oriental Churches and in that of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine. A particular word of appreciation goes to Cardinal John O'Connor, the Archbishop of New York, to Monsignor Robert Stern, current President of the Pontifical Mission, and to the Catholic community in the United States of America in general, which so generously supports the work of the Pontifical Mission. Nor can I fail to express my gratitude to all those involved in the Mission, whether at the central or regional levels, whose commitment and efforts allow it to meet the needs of the many peoples it seeks to serve.

2. In fact, it was the tragic suffering and destitution of the peoples of the Middle East at the end of the Second World War which gave rise to the desire in my predecessor Pope Pius XII to establish a Church organization specifically for the Middle East. He desired an agency which would lend needed assistance and support in the Holy Land to children, families, the wounded, the sick, the elderly, exiles. It was to this end that, in 1949, the Pontifical Mission for Palestine was founded; and today, fifty years later, the Mission has extended its charitable activity to Cyprus, Iraq and

Syria.

In the past fifty years, the Middle East has not ceased to experience moments of great tension and conflict, often exploding in acts of violence and outright war. In these circumstances, the Pontifical Mission has increased its efforts aimed at helping the local populations to rebuild their lives: it is involved in reconstruction and development projects; it provides badly needed health care services; it has contributed to the re-establishment of agricultural, industrial and artisan activities. In this way, the Pontifical Mission is an eloquent expression of that “new culture of international solidarity and cooperation” (*Incarnationis Mysterium*, 12) which is so necessary in the modern world, and which must be a hallmark of the new millennium. This shared responsibility for the well-being of all, especially on the part of the wealthier nations and of the private sector, is part of the deeper meaning of the Great Jubilee upon which we are about to embark (cf. *ibid.*).

3. My dear friends, it is in no small way through you and your support of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine that the Church is able to be actively and effectively present in the Holy Land and in the Middle East. I pray that you and all those associated with the work of the Mission will be renewed in faith and love as you seek ever better ways of helping those in need not only of material support but especially of opportunities for personal and social development. This is the surest path for establishing a true and lasting peace in the lives of the peoples of the Middle East.

Commending you, your work and all the benefactors of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, as well as those whom it seeks to help, to the powerful intercession of Mary of Nazareth, Mother of the Redeemer, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.