



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE SYNOD OF THE CHALDEAN BISHOPS

Monday 12 June 2000 Your Beatitude,

Your Eminence,

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*1. "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together" (Acts 2: 1). There was the Mother of Jesus, the Apostles, the disciples: they were all waiting in prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Among the witnesses of Pentecost there were also "residents of Mesopotamia" (Acts 2: 9). Those who were to become the first disciples of the Messiah are amazed, for they hear God's marvels proclaimed in their own tongues (cf. Acts 2: 11). Peter, Prince of the Apostles, announces the Good News to them in the power of the Holy Spirit: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses" (Acts 2: 32). It is a great joy for me, Peter's Successor, to be able to greet you, the Bishops of the Chaldean Church gathered round your Patriarch, and to be able to pray with you, the successors of the Apostles for this beloved Church for which you have pastoral responsibility and which is sorely tried. My thoughts also turn to all the Iraqi people. In recent years I have often been close to all these people, to their children, their elderly, their sick, their families and everyone suffering in body or soul. On many occasions I have reminded the international community of its duty, so that people already suffering might be spared new trials. Today I say again even more forcefully: may everyone strive to end the sufferings of the many civilian victims!2. On the day after the feast of Pentecost, which reminded us of the mystery of the outpouring of the Spirit on the newborn Church, it is particularly significant to hold a Synod like the one you are beginning today. "They were all together" (Acts 2: 1). Your Synod of Bishops of the Chaldean Church is a meeting which, according to the word's etymology, is a particular way of journeying together, so that the paths of the different communities can converge. It is an expression of the Church which lets herself be guided by the Spirit and strives to live communion internally and with the universal Church, in accordance with what the Second Vatican Council stated (cf. *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 9). When I met the Patriarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches on 29 September 1998, on the occasion of the plenary assembly of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, I stressed that "episcopal collegiality is exercised in a particularly significant way in the canonical structure of your Churches. The Patriarchs in fact act in close union with their Synods. The aim of any authentic synodal action is harmony, so that the Trinity may be glorified in the Church" (*Address to the Patriarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches*, n. 3). The whole of the Church's history shows that harmony is necessary to express the Church's love for her Bridegroom and to attest before men and women God's merciful love for them. The Acts of the Apostles teach us that it is neither the absence of different opinions nor the absence of conflict which creates harmony, but the Church's ardent desire to obey God's will for her, a desire enlivened by prayer, by listening to one another, by openness to the voice of the Spirit, by mutual trust. Harmony thus makes the Church's face young and wrinkle-free, and allows the Holy Spirit to

make the impossible possible.³ Speaking of Bishops he knew personally, St Ephrem of Nisibis sketches a beautiful portrait of the Shepherd of Christ's flock (*Carmina Nisibena*, 15-21). What are the features that form the spiritual beauty of a Bishop? Orthodoxy of doctrine, the science and art of preaching, asceticism and chastity, modesty which prevents all jealousy, disregard for material goods, the pursuit of mercy and gentleness with recourse to firmness when necessary, spiritual fatherhood, love for the Holy Mysteries. This is a continuing invitation to each one in the ministry entrusted to him, which makes Pastors witnesses by their exemplary lives and their teaching.⁴ It is also the Bishop's responsibility to encourage and motivate the priests of his eparchy, who are his co-workers and form "a precious spiritual crown" around him (St Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Magnesians*, 13). The painful circumstances in which many of the priests and faithful of the Chaldean Church live are a particularly appropriate call in this Great Jubilee year to cultivate priestly and Christian virtues, in order not to lose hope. The priests who assist you need more than ever to be fortified by your example, to feel supported by you in living in fraternal communion and in sharing your apostolic mission, to be closely involved in the pastoral projects that have been or are being prepared for the territories of your Patriarchate and the diaspora.⁵ Your Church rightly rejoices in the remarkable attachment of her faithful to their Pastors. Lay people, by virtue of their dignity as sons and daughters of God, also have their part in the Church's mission. As the Second Vatican Council says again: "The Pastors, indeed, know well how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the whole Church. For they know that they themselves were not established by Christ to undertake alone the whole salvific mission of the Church to the world, but that it is their exalted office so to be shepherds of the faithful and also recognize the latter's contribution and charisms that everyone in his own way will, with one mind, cooperate in the common task" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 30). These directives will aid you in your reflection and your search for the means to carry out the mission entrusted to you. Thus all the members of the Chaldean Church, Patriarch, Bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful will be able to proclaim God's marvels day after day and be witnesses to the risen Christ, just like the first Christian community.⁶ The closeness of the feast of Pentecost also turns our attention to the action of the Holy Spirit in the People of God. Worship of the Lord is the centre of the Church's life, and the Spirit has a particular action in the community and in the hearts of believers. Keep alive your beautiful liturgical tradition, which allows you to discover and to live the divine mysteries so that you may receive life in abundance! The sacraments of our salvation are a source of renewal for the Church. St Ephrem spoke of this in poetic words: "Here is fire and the Spirit in the bosom of your Mother; here is fire and the Spirit in the river of your Baptism. Fire and Spirit in your Baptism; in the bread and in the cup, fire and the Holy Spirit" (*Hymns on the Faith*, 10, 17). You are called to pass on the treasures of your liturgical and spiritual patrimony to the faithful of your Church, and to make them more widely known. To pass on such a heritage effectively, you must first receive it with love and then live it in your own community, for what is lived is a witness in the eyes of the world.⁷ At the end of our meeting, I entrust you to the intercession of Our Lady. May the Blessed Virgin Mary intercede for you, Fathers of this Synod of the Chaldean Church, whom I greet once again with deep fraternal affection. May you have the same sentiments as this All Holy Mother! "Come, let us admire the Virgin all pure, a marvel in herself, unique in all creation; she gave birth without having known man, a pure soul filled with wonder. Each day her spirit was devoted to praise, for it rejoiced at the twofold marvel: virginity preserved, child most beloved! Blessed be the One who shone forth from her!" (*Hymn on Mary*, 7, 2, attributed to St Ephrem). I ask the Holy Spirit to accompany you, so that your Synod will bear abundant fruit for the Chaldean Church. I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and extend it to your priests, your deacons, your religious and to all the Christian people. © Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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