



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF GREECE
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Small Throne Room
Monday, 30 October 2006*

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

Since you come from a Land deeply loved by the Apostle to the Gentiles, I am eager to greet you with his own words: "I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him" (1 Cor 1: 4-5).

I am pleased to greet you as the Successor of Peter, the Apostle to whom Christ entrusted special responsibility for promoting the unity of the Church, the Bride for whom he poured out his Blood on the Cross.

The *ad limina* visit you are making is of special importance as it deepens the communion which, by the grace of God, exists between us. It is a gift of God of which we are aware and which we intend to guard jealously.

In the Meetings I have had with each one of you, I could perceive your common concern about the rapidly evolving composition of your communities. The political and social events that have occurred in the area in which the Churches entrusted to you are located have given rise to pastoral problems that urgently need to be solved.

In particular, the considerable influx of Catholics from the surrounding nations makes new demands on you and your clergy for ministerial service that it is far from easy to provide.

Thus, I understand your apostolic anxiety about a flock which has grown considerably and to

which variety has been brought by members of the faithful who speak different languages and belong to different rites.

Precisely in the light of this new situation, I think that the development of constructive dialogue with the other Episcopates would be particularly appropriate.

Provident decisions from the point of view of both obtaining the necessary sacred ministries and reliable financial sources will not fail to result from the emerging challenge. Respect for specific identities must be borne in mind but without sacrificing the life and programmes of the Church which Christ has entrusted to you.

You are the Pastors of the People of God in Greece: it is not merely a matter of an honorific title but a true responsibility with precise duties.

In this regard, I cordially urge you to persevere in your efforts to encourage the pastoral care of vocations: it is necessary, on the one hand, to cultivate the seeds of a vocation that God continues to sow in the hearts of boys and girls in our time; on the other, Christian communities should be asked to pray more intensely to the "Lord of the harvest", so that he will inspire new ministers and new consecrated persons who will carry out appropriately the various tasks required by the Mystical Body of Christ.

In any case, I hope that with generous dedication on the part of all it will be possible, even in the present situation, to provide for the spiritual needs of the many immigrants who have received a dignified and cordial welcome in your Country. This is the style proper to your People, who have always been able to open themselves to constructive contact with the surrounding peoples.

Furthermore, thanks to this innate prerogative you will certainly be able to determine the correct approach, in dialogue with other Catholic Episcopates of the various rites, to organize adequate pastoral offices for a fruitful Gospel witness in your Country.

Providence has put you in close contact with our Orthodox brethren who constitute the majority of your fellow-citizens. All have a great desire to participate together at the one altar on which, under the signs of the Sacrament, Christ's unique Sacrifice is offered! Let us intensify our prayers so as to hasten the blessed day on which we will be granted to break Bread together and to drink together from the same Cup which holds the price of our salvation.

In this context, I hope to see unfolding ever greater prospects of constructive dialogue between the Orthodox Church of Greece and the Catholic Church, and an increase in joint spiritual, cultural and practical initiatives.

I am also pleased to address my thoughts and good wishes to His Beatitude Christódoulos,

Archbishop of Athens and All Greece; I ask the Lord to sustain his farsightedness and prudence in carrying out the demanding service that the Lord has entrusted to his care.

Through him I wish to greet with deep affection the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Greece and all the faithful whom it serves lovingly and with apostolic dedication.

I am sure, venerable Brothers, that you will offer your effective collaboration to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and to the Members of the Episcopal College of the Orthodox Church of Greece in order to encourage further progress on the way to the full unity for which we long.

I also grasped in the conversations I have had with you your wish to see the State define your right to possess an appropriate and recognized juridical status.

As you well know, the current discussion of this question does not regard the Apostolic See as a leading protagonist. Indeed, this is an internal matter which nevertheless interests the Holy See, because it is anxious to find a satisfactory solution to the problems at stake, not only on the basis of the local legislation in force and the European directives but also in accordance with international law and the already consolidated praxis of cordial and fruitful bilateral relations.

In addition to dialogue, perseverance in this field is also needed. It is not necessary to add that the Catholic Church seeks no privileges but only asks to see her identity and mission recognized to make her own effective contribution to the integral well-being of the noble Greek People, of which you are an integral part.

With patience, respect for legitimate procedures and the commitment of one and all, it will be possible to attain the hoped for understanding.

Venerable Brothers, from your lips I learned with concern of the hardships of many communities due to the internal displacement of the faithful. Many find themselves spread over a wide area and consequently have serious difficulty in keeping in contact with their respective Pastors.

In light of these phenomena, the full importance of the affective and effective unity of you Bishops is also shown in an increasingly efficient internal coordination. Joint analysis of common problems will lead to shared solutions and an ecclesial process where each one is called to make his own contribution to the needs of the other, so as to build the Kingdom of God together. Indeed, it is up to a minister of God to do his utmost to ensure that the gifts bestowed by God serve for the edification of all, thereby glorifying the one Lord.

Dear friends, the Spirit of Christ has placed you in the Church as Pastors and teachers. Do not be afraid of problems, but in all things give thanks to God, cooperating with him for the salvation of

souls. Be certain that Providence will never abandon you in your efforts.

When you return to your respective Sees, convey my cordial greeting to your priests, Religious and all your faithful, assuring them of my fervent prayers and constant affection.

As I invoke upon each one the heavenly intercession of Mary, Queen of Apostles, I impart to you and to all who are entrusted to your pastoral care a special Blessing as a pledge of abundant consolations from the Lord.

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