



The Holy See

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

Friday, 1st February 2008

*Your Beatitude,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,*

I am very pleased to meet you today, at the end of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. Serious and objective reasons have prevented you from making this pilgrimage together to the See of Peter. The last *ad limina* visit of the Greek Catholic Bishops dates back to 1937. Now that your respective Churches have rediscovered full freedom, you are here representing reborn communities, vibrant with faith, which have never stopped feeling in full communion with the Successor of Peter. Welcome, Dear Brothers to this house in which intense and unceasing prayers have always been raised for the beloved Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine. Through venerable Cardinal Lubomyr Husar, Major Archbishop of Kyiv-Halyc, whom I thank for his moving expressions of affection on your behalf, through the Apostolic Administrator of the Eparchy of Mukacheve for Byzantines, and through all of you, I am pleased to greet your respective communities, the tireless priests, consecrated men and women and all those who carry out with dedication their pastoral ministry at the service of the People of God.

From the reports on the situation of your eparchies and exarchates I have been able to note your great commitment to constantly fostering, consolidating and ensuring unity and collaboration within your communities, to be able to face together the challenges that call you into question as Pastors and are at the centre of your concerns and your pastoral programmes. Thus, I admire the generous work and tireless witness that you offer to your People and to the Church. In this pastoral and missionary effort, the priests whom the Good Shepherd has placed beside you as your collaborators are a necessary help. I gladly make the most of this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation of their daily apostolic action. Encourage them, Venerable Brothers, in the various initiatives of renewal, not to pursue mundane trends but to offer society those responses

that Christ alone can give to the expectations of justice and peace in the human heart. For this reason an adequate intellectual and spiritual training is essential. It must entail a continuing course of formation, begun at the seminaries, where discipline and spiritual life must always be promoted. Subsequently, it must be continued in the course of the years in the ministry. The vocation seed-bed, which is precisely what seminaries are, stand in need of qualified educators and formation teachers who are competent in the human, scientific, doctrinal, ascetic and pastoral fields, to help future priests grow in their personal relationship with Christ, thanks to a gradual identification with him. Only in this way will they be able to assume, in a spirit of authentic ecclesial service, the pastoral responsibilities that the Bishop assigns to them.

With this in view I urge you to increase the number of courses of spiritual exercises, formation and theological and pastoral renewal for your priests, if possible also in collaboration with the Latin-rite Bishops, each one respecting its own traditions. It cannot be denied that such cooperation between the two Rites will give rise to greater harmony in the hearts of those who serve the one Church. Moreover, I am sure that with this inner disposition, it will be easier to ease possible misunderstandings, in the knowledge that both Rites belong to the one Catholic Community and both have full and equal citizenship in the one Ukrainian People. In this light, it would seem useful, venerable Brothers, for you to meet regularly, for example, once a year, with the Latin Bishops.

The consecrated life has special importance in the eparchies and exarchates entrusted to you and, with you, I thank God for this. However you have told me that certain difficulties exist in this regard, especially in the area of formation, concerning the responsible obedience of men and women religious and their cooperation in the Church's needs. With the magnanimity of Pastors and the patience of Fathers, you should exhort these brothers and sisters to defend the "non secular" character of their own specific vocation tirelessly. Help them cultivate the spirit of the Beatitudes and faithfully observe the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, with fidelity to the Gospel, so that in the Church they may bear the specific witness that is asked of them.

A further concern you have at heart is ecumenical commitment. It is necessary to recognize humbly that practical and objective obstacles remain in this field. However, one must not feel discouraged in the face of difficulties but rather continue along the way on which you have set out with prayer and with patient charity. Indeed, Orthodox and Catholics in Ukraine have sought for centuries to build up a daily, humble and serene dialogue that embraces the many aspects of life. The failures which should always be taken into account, must not slacken the enthusiasm for pursuing the objective desired by the Lord "that they may all be one" (Jn 17: 21). Some time ago, meeting the Fathers of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, I noted that, "In any case, what should be encouraged first of all is the ecumenism of love, which directly descends from the new commandment that Jesus left to his disciples. Love accompanied by consistent behaviour creates trust and opens hearts and eyes. "The dialogue of charity by its nature nourishes and enlightens the dialogue of truth: indeed, the definitive encounter to which the Spirit of Christ leads us will take place in the full truth" (*Address to*

participants in the Christian Unity Council's Plenary Assembly, 17 November 2006). The Catholic University of Ukraine will certainly be able to offer effective support for ecumenical action.

It is also important to involve the lay faithful increasingly in the Church's life so that they can make their own specific contribution to the common good of Ukrainian society. On your part this demands constant care of their formation through initiatives adapted to their lay vocation: thus, they will be able to actively contribute in the Church's mission and be living Gospel "leaven" in the various social milieus.

Venerable Brothers, today's meeting which is taking place over 70 years after the previous one, enables us to raise heartfelt thanks to God together for the rebirth of your Church after the tragic period of her persecution. On this occasion I want to assure you that the Pope carries you all in his heart, accompanies you with affection and sustains you on your far from easy mission. Please convey my cordial greeting to the priests, your first collaborators, to the men and women religious, as well as to the entire Christian people, particularly children, youth, families, the sick and all who are in difficulty. I assure each and every one of my remembrance in prayer, as I invoke upon all the constant protection of the heavenly Mother of God and of your holy Patrons. Lastly, I impart with affection a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to your communities and to the beloved population of Ukraine.