



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO HIS BEATITUDE GREGORIOS III LAHAM, B.S.,
PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH
FOR MELKITE GREEK CATHOLICS OF SYRIA** Clementine Hall

Thursday, 8 May 2008 *Your Beatitude,*

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

Dear Sons and Daughters of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, I am happy to meet you on your pilgrimage to the tomb of the Apostles. I greet in particular H.B. Gregorios III, whom I thank for his kind words expressing the vitality of the Melkite Church despite the difficult social and political situation in your region. I also address my fraternal greeting to the Bishops present, and to you, dear friends, who have come from various countries of the Middle East and the Melkite Diaspora across the world, where in your own way you express the universality of the Catholic Church. With the approach of the year I have chosen to dedicate to St Paul, I cannot forget that your Patriarchate's headquarters are based in the city of Damascus, on the road to which the Apostle experienced the event that transformed his life and opened the doors of Christianity to all the nations. Thus I encourage you on this occasion so that an intense pastoral outreach may awaken in your dioceses, in each one of your parishes and among all the faithful, a new impetus for an ever more intimate knowledge of Christ, thanks to a renewed reading of the Pauline writings. This will permit a fruitful witness among people today. Such an impetus will also be able to guarantee the Melkite Church a flourishing future. In this perspective, to assure the evangelical dynamism and unity of the communities as well as the smooth functioning of ecclesial affairs in the Patriarchal Churches the role of the Synod of Bishops has a fundamental importance. Thus it would be appropriate, each time that the law requires it and especially when it is a question of matters that concern the Bishops themselves, to give this venerable institution and not only the Permanent Synod, its own proper place. I know of the ecumenical activity of the Melkite Catholic Church and of the brotherly relations you have established with your Orthodox Brethren and I am delighted. Indeed, the commitment to the search for the unity of all Christ's disciples is an urgent obligation which stems from the ardent desire of the Lord himself. We must therefore do our utmost to break down the walls of division and distrust that prevent us from achieving it. Nevertheless, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the quest for unity is a task that concerns not only a particular Church, but the entire Church, with respect for her nature. Moreover, as the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* stresses, unity is not the fruit of human activity, it is first and foremost a gift of the Holy Spirit. Let

us therefore pray the Spirit, whose descent upon the Apostles we shall be celebrating in a few days, to help us all to work together in the quest for unity. Your Beatitude, dear Brothers and Sisters, I also appreciate the good relations you have with Muslims, with their leaders and their institutions, as well as the efforts you have made to solve, in a spirit of fraternal, sincere and objective dialogue, the problems that can arise. I rejoice, therefore, to note that along the lines of the Second Vatican Council, the Melkite Church has been committed, with Muslims, to sincerely seeking mutual understanding as well as to promoting and defending together social justice, moral values, peace and freedom for the benefit of all. Lastly, in accomplishing her mission in the turbulent and sometimes dramatic context of the Middle East, the Church finds herself facing situations in which politics play a role that may concern her. Thus it is important that she keep in touch with the Political Authorities, the institutions and the different parties. Nevertheless, it does not behove the clergy to be involved in politics. This is the task of the laity. Yet the Church must propose the light of the Gospel to people so that all may engage to serve the common good; that justice always prevail and the path of peace unfold before the peoples of this beloved region. Your Beatitude, in concluding this meeting, I entrust the Melkite Greek Catholic Church to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and to the protection of all the Saints of the East. While I ask God to give your Patriarchal Church strength and enlightenment so that she may persevere with her mission in peace and serenity, I impart to you as well as to the Bishops and all the faithful of your Patriarchate an affectionate Apostolic Blessing.

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