



The Holy See

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

*Small Throne Room
Monday, 2 February 2009*

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

I am glad to receive you this morning during your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, an eloquent sign of your communion with the Successor of Peter. I thank the President of your Bishops' Conference, Bishop Luigi Padovese, Vicar Apostolic of Anatolia, for his kind words to me on your behalf.

Through your presence, your communities with their many faces have also come to meet the Church of Rome, thereby expressing the deep unity that binds them. On your return, please greet affectionately the priests, the men and women religious and all the faithful of your dioceses on my behalf. Tell them that the Pope, who retains a vivid memory of his pilgrimage to Turkey in his heart, remains close to each one of them, to their worries and their hopes.

Your visit, which is providentially taking place during this year dedicated to St Paul, acquires special importance for you who are Pastors of the Catholic Church in Turkey, this land where the Apostle to the Gentiles was born and where he founded several communities.

As I said in the Basilica in which his tomb is located, that is why I chose to establish this special Pauline Year: "in order to listen to him and learn today from him, as our teacher, 'the faith and the truth' in which the reasons for unity among Christ's disciples are rooted" ([*First Vespers, Basilica of St Paul Outside-the-Walls, 28 June 2008*](#)).

I know that in your country you have sought to give this Jubilee Year special prominence and that numerous pilgrims are visiting the places dear to the Christian tradition. I hope that access to

these important places for the Christian faith and the celebration of worship will be increasingly facilitated for pilgrims.

Furthermore, I am very glad about the ecumenical dimension that has been given to this Pauline Year, thereby demonstrating the importance of this initiative for other Churches and Christian communities. May this year make further progress possible on the journey towards the unity of all Christians!

The existence of your local Churches, in all their diversity, fits into the course of a rich history marked by the development of the first Christian communities. So many names, so dear to the disciples of Christ, are still linked to your land, beginning with St John, St Ignatius of Antioch, St Polycarp of Smyrna and a great many other distinguished Fathers of the Church, without forgetting the Council of Ephesus at which the Virgin Mary was proclaimed "Theotokos".

More recently Pope Benedict XV and Bl. John XXIII have also contributed to the life of the nation and of the Church in Turkey. And I would also like to remember all the Christians, priests and lay people who have witnessed to the love of Christ, at times even to the point of making the supreme gift of their life, as did Fr Andrea Santoro.

May this prestigious history be for your communities – with whose strong faith and self-denial in trials I am acquainted – not only the memory of a glorious past but also an encouragement to continue generously on the path marked out, by witnessing among their brethren to God's love for every human being.

Dear Brothers, the Councils of Nicea and of Constantinople gave the Creed its final form. May this be for you and for your faithful a pressing incentive to deepen the faith of the Church and to live ever more enthusiastically the hope that derives from it. The people of God will find in authentic ecclesial communion an effective support for their faith and their hope.

In fact, "the Church is an organically structured community which finds expression in the coordination of different charisms, ministries and services for the sake of attaining the common end, which is salvation" (*Pastores gregis*, n. 44), and Bishops are primarily responsible for achieving this unity in practice.

The profound communion that must prevail among them, in the diversity of rites, is expressed mainly by genuine fraternity and by mutual collaboration that enables them to carry out their ministry in a collegial spirit and to strengthen the unity of the Body of Christ.

This unity's vital source is the Word of God whose importance in the Church's life and mission the recent Synod of Bishops highlighted anew. I therefore ask you to form the faithful of your dioceses so that Holy Scripture may not be a word of the past but may brighten their existence and truly

open them to God.

In this context I am pleased to recall that the meditation on the Word of God by Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, was a key moment in this Synodal Assembly.

Allow me to greet the priests and religious who collaborate with you for the proclamation of the Gospel. As they come from a large number of different countries, their task is often demanding. I encourage them to be ever better integrated into the situation of your local Churches, so that they may be able to give all the members of the Catholic community the pastoral attention they need, without forgetting the weakest and loneliest. The small number of priests, often insufficient for the vast amount of work, cannot but impel you to develop a strong vocations ministry.

The pastoral care of youth is one of your major concerns. Indeed, it is important that young people acquire a Christian formation that helps them to consolidate their faith and to live it, in circumstances that are often difficult. In the same perspective, the formation of lay people must also enable them to take on competently and efficiently the responsibilities entrusted to them in the Church.

The Christian community in your country lives in a nation governed by a Constitution that upholds the secular character of the State while the majority of the population is Muslim. Thus it is very important that Christians and Muslims work together for the human being and for life, as well as for peace and for justice.

Moreover, the distinction between the civil and religious spheres is certainly a value that must be protected. Yet in this framework it behoves the State to guarantee effectively freedom of worship and religious freedom, both for citizens and for religious communities, rendering all violence to believers unacceptable, whatever their religion.

In this context, I know of your desire and your willingness for sincere dialogue with the authorities in order to find a solution to the various problems that your communities face, including the legal recognition of the Catholic Church and her property. This recognition can only have positive consequences for everyone. It is to be hoped that permanent contacts may be established, for example, through an intermediary bilateral commission, in order to examine the issues that have not yet been resolved.

Dear Brothers, at the end of our meeting I would like to repeat to you the words of hope addressed to the Churches of Ephesus and Smyrna in the Book of Revelation: "You are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.... Do not fear what you are about to suffer.... Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rv 2:3, 10).

May the intercession of St Paul and the Theotokos obtain that you live in this hope which comes to

us from Christ who is Risen and alive among us. I warmly impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing to you, as well as to the priests, the men and women religious and all the faithful of your dioceses.

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