



The Holy See

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

Saturday, 24 January 2009

*Your Beatitude,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

I receive you with great joy as you fulfil your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*, you who are the Pastors of the Chaldean Church, with your Patriarch, H.B. Cardinal Emmanuel III Delly, whom I thank for the kind words that he has addressed to me in your name. This visit is an important moment since it allows you to consolidate the bonds of faith and communion with the Church of Rome and with the Successor of Peter. It also gives me the opportunity to greet you very cordially and, through you, to greet all the faithful of your venerable Patriarchal Church, and to assure you of my ardent prayers and of my spiritual closeness, in these difficult moments that your region and Iraq in particular are experiencing.

Allow me to recall with emotion the victims of violence in Iraq in the course of these last years. I am thinking of Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mossul, of Fr Ragheed Aziz Ganni, and of the many other priests and faithful of your patriarchal Church. Their sacrifice is the sign of their love for the Church and for their own country. I pray to God so that the men and women longing for peace in this beloved region unite their efforts to stop the violence and thus to permit all to live in security and reciprocal harmony! In this context, it is with emotion that I receive the gift of the cope used by Archbishop Faraj Rahho in the daily celebration of Mass and the stole used by Fr Ragheed Aziz Ganni. This gift bespeaks their supreme love for Christ and the Church.

The Chaldean Church, whose origins date back to the first century of the Christian era, have a long and venerable tradition that expresses her rootedness in the Eastern region, in which she is present from her beginnings, and also for her irreplaceable contribution to the universal Church, especially her theologians and spiritual masters. Her history also demonstrates how she has always participated in an active and fruitful way in the life of your nations.

Today the Chaldean Church, which holds an important place among the diverse components of your country, must continue this mission at the service of their human and spiritual development. To reach this goal, it is necessary to promote a high cultural level among the faithful, especially the youth. A good formation in the various fields of knowledge, both religious and lay, is a precious investment for the future.

By maintaining cordial relations with members of other communities, the Chaldean Church is called to carry out a fundamental role as moderator in view of the edification of a new society in which each one can live in harmony and reciprocal respect. I know that the coexistence between the Muslim and Christian communities has always been uncertain. Christians, who have always lived in Iraq, are its rightful citizens, with the rights and duties of all, without religious discrimination. I wish to offer my support for the efforts for understanding and good relations that you have chosen as the common path to live in the same land that is holy for all.

To fulfil her mission, the Church must strengthen her bonds of communion with her Lord who gathers her and sends her out among the people. This communion must first of all be lived in the Church, so that her witness is credible, as Jesus himself affirmed: "that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be [one] in us, that the world may believe that you sent me" (Jn 17: 21). Therefore, may the Word of God always be at the centre of your plans and of your pastoral work! It is on the fidelity to this Word that unity among all the faithful is built, in communion with their Pastors. In this perspective, the orientations of the Second Vatican Council on the liturgy will give everyone the possibility to welcome with ever greater success the gifts made by the Lord to his Church in the liturgy and in the sacraments.

Furthermore, in your patriarchal Church, the Synodal Assembly is an undeniable wealth that must be a privileged instrument to contribute to making her bonds of communion more solid and efficacious and to live interepiscopal charity. It is the context in which joint responsibility is effectively reached, thanks to an authentic collaboration among its members and well-prepared regular encounters that allow for planning common pastoral directives. I ask the Holy Spirit to ever increase among you reciprocal unity and trust so that the pastoral service that has been entrusted to you is fully accomplished for the greatest good of the Church and her members. On the other hand, above all in Iraq, the Chaldean Church, which is the majority, has a particular responsibility in promoting the communion and unity of the Mystical Body of Christ. I encourage you to continue meeting with the Pastors of the various Churches *sui juris* and also with the leaders of the other Christian Churches, to give impetus to ecumenism.

In each Eparchy, the various pastoral, administrative and economic structures foreseen by the law are also a precious help for you in order to realize communion within the community in an effective way and to favour collaboration.

Among the urgent matters that you must confront, there is the situation of the faithful who must

face violence every day. I honour their courage and their perseverance before the trials and the threats to which they are subject, above all in Iraq. The witness they render to the Gospel is an eloquent sign of their lively faith and of the strength of their hope. I ardently encourage you to support the faithful to overcome the current difficulties and to strengthen their presence, appealing in particular to the Authorities responsible for the recognition of their human and civil rights. I exhort them also to love the land of their ancestors, to which they are profoundly attached.

The number of faithful in the diaspora has continued to increase, above all after the recent events. I thank each person who participates in giving a fraternal welcome, in various countries, to those who have unfortunately had to leave Iraq for a period of time. It would be good if the Chaldean faithful who live beyond the national borders were to maintain and intensify their bonds with their own Patriarchate, so that they would not be cut off from their centre of unity. It is indispensable that the faithful keep their own cultural and religious identity and that their youngest members discover and appreciate the rich patrimony of their patriarchal Church. In this perspective, parish priests, in a fraternal relationship with the Bishops of the local Churches, must carefully take into consideration the spiritual and moral assistance that the faithful scattered throughout the world need. They will also be careful to ensure that the future priests, including those formed in the diaspora, appreciate and strengthen their bonds with their patriarchal Church.

Lastly, I wish to affectionately greet the priests, deacons, seminarians, the men and women religious and all those who, together with you, dedicate themselves to the proclamation of the Gospel. May all, under your paternal guidance, bear a living testimony of their unity and of the fraternity that unites them!

I know of their attachment to the Church and of their apostolic zeal. I invite them to deepen ever more their attachment to Christ and to courageously continue in their commitment to serve the Church and her mission. May your priests be fathers, brothers and friends, particularly concerned with offering them a solid initial and permanent formation, and I invite them through your words and your example to stay close to the people in need or in difficulty, to the sick and suffering.

The witness of the Church's selfless charity for all those who are in need, without distinction of their origin or religion, cannot fail to favour the expression of the solidarity of all the people of good will. Therefore, it is important to develop works of charity, so that the greatest number of faithful can concretely commit themselves to the service of the poorest. I know that in Iraq, notwithstanding the terrible moments that you have experienced and which you are still living, little works of extraordinary charity have developed which do honour to God, the Church and the Iraqi people. Your Beatitude, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I wish you to continue your mission of service to the People of God that has been entrusted to you with courage and hope. Prayer and the help of your brothers and sisters in the faith and the many people of good will throughout the world accompany you so that the face of God's love can continue to shine upon the Iraqi people who are experiencing much suffering. To the eyes of the believer, this suffering, united to Christ's

sacrifice, becomes an element of union and hope. In the same way, the blood of the martyrs of this land is an eloquent intercession before God. Bring to your diocesan faithful the greeting and the affectionate encouragement of the Successor of Peter. Entrusting each one of you to the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Hope, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to the priest, deacons, consecrated persons and all the faithful of the Chaldean Church.

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