



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF GREECE
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 5 February 2015

[Multimedia]

Dear Brother Bishops,

I greet you all with affection on the occasion of your visit *ad limina*. This, your pilgrimage to the Tombs of the Apostles, is always a special occasion to strengthen the bonds of communion with Peter's Successor and with the entire Episcopal College throughout the world. This unity fosters among you fraternal communion: it is also indispensable for the growth of the Church in Greece, as well as for the progress of the whole of society. This holds even more true in your country which now more than ever has a greater need of dialogue among the various political and cultural components, for the protection and the advancement of the common good. Therefore, do not hesitate to encourage the people entrusted to your episcopal care to bear a courageous witness of fraternity everywhere.

This diakonia of fraternity on the one hand postulates the preservation and reinforcement of the cultural traditions and the Christian roots of Hellenic society, and on the other, asks for openness toward the cultural and spiritual values borne by numerous migrants, in the spirit of sincere welcome toward these brothers and sisters, without distinction of race, language or religious creed. Your Christian communities, by showing that they are truly united among themselves and at the same time open to encounter and acceptance, especially with regard to the most disadvantaged, are able to make a real contribution to transforming society, in order to render it more consistent with the Gospel ideal. I am pleased to know that you are already committed to this pastoral and charitable action, especially in favour of immigrants, also illegal ones, many of whom are Catholic. I wholeheartedly encourage you to persevere with a renewed impetus to spread the Gospel, especially involving young people in this work: they are the nation's future.

In the face of the ongoing economic and financial crisis, which has stricken your country in a

particularly hard way, do not tire of exhorting everyone to have confidence in the future, opposing the so-called culture of pessimism. The spirit of solidarity, to which every Christian is called to testify in practice in everyday life, constitutes a leaven of hope. It is important that you maintain constructive relations with the Authorities in your country, as well as with the various components of society, in order to spread and support an attitude of solidarity, of dialogue and also of cooperation with other European countries.

In the same spirit, I encourage you to continue interpersonal dialogue with our Orthodox brothers, in order to promote the necessary ecumenical journey, which is an essential commitment for a future of peace and spiritual fruitfulness for your entire nation.

To carry out the mission of evangelization and human advancement to which the Church in Greece is called, the presence of a generous and motivated clergy is indispensable. For this reason, I exhort you to increase, with appropriate means, the pastoral care of vocations in order to address the inadequate number of clergy. In this regard, I ask you to convey to the priests of your dioceses, many of whom are elderly, all my affection and my appreciation of their apostolic zeal in spite of the shortage of resources.

A necessary and precious contribution to the proclamation of the Gospel is offered by the Institutes of Consecrated Life, to which I invite you to pay proper attention, so they may continue their mission in your country, despite the many difficulties. I am thinking above all of the educational sphere, to which they are especially committed. With the aim of revitalizing Christian communities, you are called to enhance the role of the lay faithful. Their cooperation in the ministry of the Bishops and the clergy is crucial in order to face current challenges and those of the future. This means taking appropriate care of their formation, and increasing the presence of movements and ecclesial associations. When guided well by Pastors, these are appreciated everywhere for their missionary commitment and the Christian joy they spread, always working in harmony with the pastoral guidelines of the Particular Churches and well integrated in the dioceses and parishes.

The weakening of the family, due also to the process of secularization, requires that the Church continue marriage preparation programmes, without forgetting the indispensable work with young people, for their Christian formation. The elderly too, should not be far from your thoughts; many of them today are alone or neglected, because the throwaway culture is unfortunately spreading somewhat everywhere. Do not tire of underlining with your words and actions that the elderly's presence and participation in social life is crucial for a people's comprehensive journey.

Dear Brother Bishops, I would like to express my appreciation to you for the work of evangelization which, notwithstanding many difficulties, you are carrying out in Greece. The legal recognition of the Catholic Church by the competent Authorities is of the greatest importance as it helps you to look to the future with serenity, while persevering today with confident dynamism and with the

enthusiasm of those who bear witness to the Lord who died and rose. I encourage you to continue striving with Gospel joy in your mission. I entrust you, the priests, the consecrated people and all the lay faithful of your dioceses to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and, while I ask you to pray for me and for my ministry, I wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you.

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