



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO ROMANIA

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

St Joseph Latin-Rite Cathedral, Bucharest

Saturday, 8 May 1999

1. *“Dress yourself and put on your sandals”* (Acts 12:8). The angel says these words to the Apostle Peter, whom the first reading shows us confined in prison. Guided by the angel, Peter escaped from prison and regained his freedom.

The Lord Jesus also spoke to us of freedom in the Gospel passage we have just heard: *“You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”* (Jn 8:32). Those who are listening to him do not understand: *“From what slavery must we be freed?”*, they ask themselves. And Jesus explains that the most deceptive and repressive slavery is that of sin (cf. Jn 8:34). Only he can free us from that slavery.

This is the message that the Church proclaims to the world: Christ is our freedom, because he is the truth. Not an abstract truth, gropingly sought by ever restless human reason. The truth for us is the person of Christ. It is he who told us: *“I am the way, and the truth and the life”* (Jn 14:6). If the darkness of sin is defeated by the light of life, then there is no slavery that can suppress freedom.

2. You know this truth well, beloved brother Alexandru Todea, Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, and you, Archbishop Gheorghe Gutiu, because before you, as before Peter, the heavy door of slavery opened by itself and you were given back to your Churches together with many other brothers and sisters, some of whom we have the joy and privilege of greeting and spiritually kissing here at this Divine Liturgy in the Byzantine rite. Others were welcomed instead into the Father's embrace in the days of persecution, without being able to see basic freedoms restored in

their country, including freedom of religion. Beloved brothers and sisters, your chains and the chains of your people are the glory and pride of the Church: the truth has set you free! They tried to silence your freedom, to suppress it, but they did not succeed. Inwardly you remained free, even though in chains; free, even though in tears and privation; free, even though your communities were attacked and violated; but “*earnest prayer was made to God by the Church*” (Acts 12:5) for you, for them, for all believers in Christ whom deceit sought to destroy. There is no son of darkness who can tolerate the hymn of freedom, since it reproaches him for his error and sin.

I have come in these days to pay homage to the Romanian people, who historically are a sign of the extension of Roman civilization its this part of Europe, where to memory, language and culture have been perpetuated. I have come to pay homage to the brothers and sisters who hallowed this land by the witness of their faith, producing a flourishing civilization inspired by the Gospel of Christ; to a Christian people proud of their identity, often defended at a high price in the sufferings and vicissitudes that have marked its life.

Today I am here to pay homage to you, sons and daughters of the Greek-Catholic Church, who for three centuries have borne witness to your faith in unity, sometimes with unprecedented sacrifices. I come to you to express the Catholic Church's gratitude, and not only hers: you have offered a witness of liberating truth to the entire Christian world, to all people of good will.

From this cathedral my thoughts must turn to Blaj. In spirit I kiss that land of martyrdom and make my own the moving words of the great poet Mihai Eminescu, who said of it: “I thank you, O God, for helping me so that I could see it”. At this holy celebration, I extend my affectionate greetings to my beloved Brother, Lucian Muresan, Metropolitan of your Romanian Greek-Catholic Church, to the Bishops, the priests, the deacons, the religious and all the faithful.

3. Throughout your history various Christian inspirations — Latin, Constantinopolitan and Slavic — combined with the distinctive genius of your peoples. This precious religious heritage was safeguarded by your Eastern communities, together with their brothers and sisters of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Your ancestors wanted to re-establish visible union with the Church of Rome. In the *Clausula Unionis* they stated among other things: “*We, the aforementioned, are one with our whole tradition: the ecclesiastical rites, the Divine Liturgy, the fasts and our calendar are to be preserved intact*”. That union is almost 300 years old: I consider it providential and highly significant that the celebrations of the third centenary will coincide with the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

In that union were echoed centuries of the Romanian people's history and culture. It contributed significantly to this history and culture, as is shown by the school founded in Blaj, which Eminescu did not by chance salute as the “*little Rome*”. Your commitment, dear brothers and sisters of the

Greek-Catholic Church, is one of fidelity to your history and tradition. Persons like Teofil Szeremi and Anghel Atanasie Popa, who strenuously defended their cultural identity from whoever tried to ensnare it, showing how catholicity and national culture not only can coexist, but can enrich each other by opening themselves to a universality which broadens horizons and enables them to avoid being self-contained and self-absorbed. At the foot of the splendid iconostasis in your cathedral repose has finally been given to the remains of venerable Bishop Inochentie Micu Klein, another person who with generosity and courage loved and defended his catholicity, strongly tied to his Romanian identity. Proof of this fruitful synthesis is the fact that in your Church the beautiful Romanian language entered the liturgy, and Greek-Catholic Romanians worked for the intellectual renewal and strengthening of their own national identity.

4. This heritage also drew vital nourishment from the riches of the Byzantine liturgy and tradition which you share with our brothers and sisters of the Orthodox Church. You are called to give this heritage new life and to renew it where necessary, taking your inspiration from the sensibilities of those who wanted union with Rome and from what the Catholic Church expects of you. Fidelity to your tradition, so rich and composite, must be continually renewed today, when new areas of freedom are given to you, so that your Church, by returning to her roots and by openness to the Spirit's call, may be more and more herself and, precisely because of this multifaceted identity, contribute to the growth of the universal Church.

An exhilarating task awaits you: to rekindle hope in the hearts of the faithful belonging to your resurgent Church. Devote time and attention to the laity, particularly to the young, who are the Church's future: teach them to meet Christ in liturgical prayer, restored to its beauty and solemnity after the constraints of secrecy, in diligent meditation on Sacred Scripture, in assimilation of the Fathers, theologians and mystics. Teach young people to strive for difficult goals, as befits the children of martyrs. Teach them to reject the facile illusions of consumerism; to stay in their land so that together they can build a future of peace and prosperity; to be open to Europe and the world; to serve the poor, who are the icon of Christ; to prepare themselves to be Christian professionals in order to imbue civil society with honesty and solidarity; not to distrust politics but to make their presence felt with that spirit of service it particularly needs.

Work for qualified theological instruction, knowing full well that future priests are the guides who will lead their communities into the new millennium. Join forces and train your teachers and educators, providing them with roots in your particular identity and in the universal scope of the Church. Care for religious life and work for the rebirth of monasticism, which is so closely connected with the very essence of the Eastern Churches.

5. "*Above all these*", I say to you with St Paul, "*put on love*" (Col 3:14). Even before being deprived of the priceless gift of freedom and of life itself, you suffered from not feeling loved, from being forced underground, with painful isolation from national and international life. Above all, a painful wound was inflicted on your relations with your brothers and sisters of the Orthodox Church,

despite the fact that you shared with many of them the sufferings of bearing witness to Christ amid persecution. Even if communion between Catholics and the Orthodox is still incomplete, “I add that this communion is already perfect in what we all consider the highest point of the life of grace, *martyria* unto death, the truest communion possible with Christ who shed his Blood, and by that sacrifice brings near those who once were far off (cf. *Eph 2:13*)” (Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, n. 84).

For Christians these are days of forgiveness and reconciliation. Without this witness the world will not believe: how can we credibly speak of God who is Love if there is no respite from conflict? Heal the wounds of the past with love. May your shared suffering not lead to separation but accomplish the miracle of reconciliation. Is this not the marvel that the world expects from believers? You too, dear brothers and sisters, are called to make your valuable contribution to the ecumenical dialogue in truth and in charity, according to the directives of the Second Vatican Council and the Church's Magisterium.

6. I have just come from this city's Catholic cemetery: on the graves of the few known martyrs and of the many whose mortal remains did not even receive the honour of Christian burial, I prayed for you all, and I called upon your martyrs and confessors of the faith to intercede for you with our Father in heaven. In particular, I called upon the Bishops to continue being your Pastors from heaven: Vasile Aftenie and Ioan Balan, Valeriu Traian Frentiu, Ioan Suciu, Tit Liviu Chinezu and Alexandru Rusu. Your martyrology begins with the concelebration in spirit of these Bishops who mingled their blood with that of the Eucharistic sacrifice they celebrated each day. I also called upon Cardinal Iuliu Hossu, who preferred to stay with his people until death, refusing to go to Rome to receive the Cardinal's biretta from the Pope because this would have meant leaving his beloved land.

On your journey to Christ, the source of true freedom, may they accompany you with Mary, the holy Mother of God. I commend you to her in the words you sang to her with trusting abandonment at the time of persecution: “*Do not desert us, O Mother, exhausted on the way, because we are the children of your tears*”.