



The Holy See

*ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE CHALDEAN CHURCH
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT*

Tuesday, 11 December 2001

Your Beatitude,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

1. Today I am pleased to welcome you, the Bishops of the Chaldean Church from Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and Egypt, Syria, Turkey and the United States of America, with your Patriarch, His Beatitude Raphaël I Bidawid for this visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. I greet you with the words that open the Second Letter of Peter: "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours in the justice of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ: may grace and peace be yours in abundance" (II Pt 1,1-2). I would especially like to thank those of you who, after long years of service and self-sacrifice, have put their episcopal charge at the disposition of the Patriarchal Synod. With St Paul, I "give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, so that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge - even as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you" (I Cor 1,4-6).

2. At this time, we remember that the blood of countless martyrs has made fruitful your ancient and venerable Chaldean Church from the first centuries of the Christian era. She has shone in her great poets and teachers, in her schools of theology and exegesis, such as that of Nisibis. Her masters of asceticism and monks make her resplendent with a mystical tradition of unusual spiritual depth: it suffices to mention St Ephrem, Doctor of the Church, called the "Harp of the Holy Spirit", who alone stands for all that the Church in your region has given to the universal Church!

3. Today the Chaldean Church in Iraq is going through a difficult period. This crisis has many

causes, internal as well as external. But is it not especially at this time of crisis that we Bishops should "hear what the Spirit says to the Churches" (Apoc 2,7)?

Dear Brothers, once again I want to express my compassion for your communities in Iraq, sorely tried like the entire population of the country, suffering for years from the severity of the embargo imposed upon it. I implore the Lord to enlighten the minds and hearts of the leaders of nations so that they may work for the re-establishment of a just and lasting peace in this part of the world, and all attacks on the security of individuals and the good of peoples will stop. The day of fasting, for which I have appealed to all faithful Catholics, will offer every Church a good chance to have a closer relationship with people who are suffering by going without food on the day. On that day, we will ask God to help your people and to open the hearts of all to the sufferings unjustly inflicted on so many of your brothers and sisters.

4. In the course of the past 2,000 years, the Lord has never stopped loving and protecting your Church, faithful to his promise: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28,20). This loving fidelity of the Lord to his disciples acts as the mirror in which the bishops can discern their own fidelity, as the recent Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops suggested, when it stressed that they are called to live holiness "in the exercise of their apostolic ministry with the humility and strength of the Good Shepherd" (*Message of the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, n. 14; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 7 November 2001, p. 6).

As I have said before, a bishop's ministry "is not under the banner of triumphalism, but rather of the Cross of Christ" (*Address to the New Bishops appointed between 1 January 2000 and June 2001*, 5 July 2001, n. 2; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 18 July 2001, p. 3), which makes you servants of your brethren after the example of the One who became the Servant of all.

In your quinquennial reports, the bishop clearly appears as the servant of unity when he is engaged in the mission of supporting the priests, his collaborators, in the service of their apostolic ministry, and of imparting them a missionary zeal that is always rooted in the sacramental brotherhood, in deepest communion with the mystery of Christ. It is the bishop's concern to include the faithful, with their charism, in the pastoral orientations he gives his Church so that she may accomplish her first mission: to announce the Gospel. The bishop is also the servant of unity when, with his brother bishops of the same region or rite or of different rites, he undertakes to develop collaboration and to discern the signs of the times. By normally residing in their Dioceses as the pastors of the flock, as the Code of the Canons of the Eastern Churches justly recommends (can 93; 204), the Patriarch and Bishops give witness to the people, by carrying out the mission that is entrusted to them with prudence and fairness, deeply concerned to live in conformity with their ministry.

5. Your Church is justly proud of her priests, her religious and her faithful: they are her vital strength in times of trial and I want to encourage them. First of all I want to thank the priests.

Please convey to them the affectionate greetings of the Pope, who thanks them for all they are doing in their ministry. They live among the faithful often in difficult situations, in order to bring them the Good News of salvation, to celebrate the sacraments of the New Testament, and to lead them through the complexities of the present time to our heavenly home. They are particularly attentive to the situation of young people, supporting their Christian hope and helping them take their place in society. They are close to those who have left their native country and are living in precarious conditions as refugees or immigrants. May they continue their apostolic work with courage, and never weary of doing good (cf. 2 Thes 3,13)!

In a large number of your Dioceses, there are young men who want to be priests. This is a sign of the spiritual vitality of the communities that have them. I insist on the good fortune and the responsibility that these young vocations represent for you, bishops, and on your obligation to guide them in their discernment up to the moment of their ordination. The Patriarchal Interterritorial Seminary, in Baghdad, must be an important concern of your episcopal ministry; it is important that it be directed by a team of competent and respected priests, who can transmit to the seminarians the deposit of the faith and open them to the understanding and contemplation of the Christian mystery.

The fact that the seminary forms seminarians of different rites augurs well for the Church of tomorrow, permitting future priests to study their own tradition in depth while they accept with esteem and understanding those of other rites, with a view to necessary collaboration, and learn to be open to future cooperation with the faithful of other Churches or Ecclesial Communities.

I also want to thank the men and women religious who collaborate in many ways with the life of your Dioceses. In great pastoral closeness to the people, they courageously witness to the values of the Gospel in accord with their religious vows; and they have shown great readiness for the service of the mission, collaborating with the diocesan priests. Often involved in educating children and young people, as well as in nursing the sick and helping the poor, they are witnesses of God's tenderness for a people who suffer.

6. The faithful hunger for God's Word, and also for a sound doctrinal and spiritual formation in order to grow in the experience of God and to find the strength and encouragement to become true witnesses of the Gospel in daily life, in the family, at work or in society. Wherever possible I invite you to develop formation programmes that correspond to this desire. Indeed, lay people will be able to take part in the work of the new evangelization, in a special and original way, through the witness of their life and the proclamation of Christ the Saviour, and show respect for and willingness to dialogue with other religious believers among whom they live.

7. You have come, dear Brothers, to celebrate a Synod of your Patriarchal Church here in Rome. I thank you for this brotherly work which offers you mutual support and helps you to evaluate together the needs of the Church, and your common progress, so that you can pursue with

courage the necessary renewal of your communities in the spirit of your tradition and in fidelity to the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.

I ask you to be very attentive to the structures of communion within your patriarchal Church. In an Eastern Catholic Church, the Synod Assembly is one of the privileged places for fraternal communion, which will always be the source of your apostolic effectiveness, as you observe the Lord's commandment: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13,35). In the name of the Lord, I urge you to go beyond any partisan spirit and ever more to join forces. Do everything with brotherly frankness, so that you may continually seek the will of the Lord and personal interest may not becloud the pastoral service entrusted to you!

The Patriarch is "father and head" of your Church. In fact, it is his duty to set the example and to foster communion within the episcopate called to work for the common good. I ask the Holy Spirit to create among you an atmosphere that is truly fraternal and trusting, to move beyond the present difficulties. I warmly hope that in the same perspective, you may give fresh vigour to the work of the *Interritual Meeting of the Bishops of Iraq*, which must be convoked at regular intervals to keep up its common, real and effective work at the service of evangelization.

I encourage you to pursue good relations with our Christian brethren of other confessions, ever willing to inspire renewed initiatives of prayer and common witness, and I ardently invoke upon all Christ's disciples the gift of unity for which the Lord so ardently prayed. I know you have good relations with the other religious authorities of your country. Since you realize the importance of interreligious dialogue today, in the effort to bring about mutual understanding and peace among men and in the spirit of my recent invitation to all religious leaders throughout the world to meet once again in Assisi, I ask you to continue this dialogue daily with all!

8. You must face the urgent pastoral care of your faithful in the diaspora objectively. I know you consider the problem of emigration a serious one that impoverishes the local communities and uproots people, a phenomenon that is accentuated further by the economic sanctions against Iraq. You can only face this tragedy collegially, in the conviction that the Chaldean Church's future also depends on the diaspora. Be assured that the Holy See and the particular Churches around the world will help you to meet the pastoral needs of the diaspora, for whom you also need to offer all the pastoral direction you can!

9. Your Beatitude, dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the priesthood, in the name of the Successor of Peter, please greet warmly all the faithful of the Chaldean Church in your Dioceses; offer my affectionate support to the priests and deacons, as well as to the men and women religious, who are so devoted to the service of their brethren! May the motherly protection of the Virgin Mary, whose Immaculate Conception we have just celebrated, be with you every day in your mission! I wholeheartedly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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