



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO HIS BEATITUDE IGNACE PIERRE VIII,
PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH FOR SYRIAN CATHOLICS
ON THE OCCASION OF A VISIT
OF ECCLESIASTICAL COMMUNION
WITH THE CHURCH OF ROME**

Friday, 8 June 2001

*Your Beatitude,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear sons and daughters of the Syrian Catholic Church,*

1. With great joy, for the first time since your election to the patriarchal see of Antioch in Syria, I welcome Your Beatitude. Your presence reminds me of my recent pilgrimage to your country in the footsteps of St Paul during which the clergy and faithful of your Church warmly welcomed me and showed me their spiritual and apostolic drive. I ask you, who are here today, to give my affectionate greeting to all your brothers and sisters.

I am delighted to meet with you here, surrounded by Bishops of your Patriarchate, by priests and faithful, whom I greet, to share this great moment of fraternal communion. Through it we express the bonds that unite the Syrian Catholic Church to the whole Catholic Church. We have just lived this communion in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy where we have shared the one Body of Christ. Through this sharing, we have fully expressed the ecclesial communion between Peter's Successor and Your Beatitude, Father and Head of the Syrian Catholic Church of Antioch, apostolic see and city that can be proud of its particular ecclesiastical tradition. Your patriarchal community, full of love and strong in faith, is the bearer of a rich spiritual, liturgical and theological tradition, the Antiochian tradition, that continues to nourish the Eastern Churches.

2. You are called, primarily by your presence in various Middle Eastern countries, to be like yeast

which, in a discreet way, has a fundamental role in leavening the whole lump of dough. Your mission is of capital importance for the faithful and for everyone else, to whom the love of Christ impels us to announce the Good News of salvation. I praise the Christian's care for the human, spiritual, moral and intellectual education of young people through an organized school system and high quality catechetical programmes. I sincerely hope that the society will recognize ever more the Church's role in the formation of youth, so that, without any discrimination, the fundamental values and the elements that will make the young people of today, tomorrow's leaders in their families and in social life, will be transmitted to the younger generations. May this lead to a greater solidarity and a more intense fraternity among all in the nation. Communicate to the young people my affection, reminding them that the Church and society need their enthusiasm and their hope.

You are heirs of a history of faith nourished by the theological thought of great schools like Edessa or Nisibi. Through the teachings of illustrious, holy Fathers like Ephrem, "Harp of the Holy Spirit" and Doctor of the Church, James of Sêrug, Narsaj and many others, you must continually follow their footsteps. You must develop the theological and spiritual studies proper to your tradition which will strengthen your ecclesial communities and favour contacts with your Orthodox brothers. In this perspective, I invite you to intensify the formation of priests so that they will be witnesses of the Word of God in their teaching and their lives, and they can accompany the People of God, helping the faithful to root their lives and their mission in an ever deeper relationship with Christ. In this way the Church will be fully missionary everywhere and to the ends of the earth.

3. I take the opportunity, Your Beatitude, to recall your immediate predecessors, in the first place the dear Brother Mar Ignace Antoine II Hayek, who with an exemplary fervour and devotion, dedicated his whole life to the service of God and of the community entrusted to him. With great wisdom and fatherly goodness he guided the Syrian Catholic Church for 30 years. I would be grateful if you give him my cordial and warmest best wishes so that he may be serene in this period of his life. I also greet Cardinal Mar Ignace Moussa I Daoud, to whom I have entrusted, in the Roman Curia, the important responsibility of guiding the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. I thank him for having accepted it with unselfishness and deep ecclesial zeal, thus showing his love for the Church. He makes present, to Peter's Successor and to the Roman Curia, that most precious treasure which the Eastern Churches represent.

4. Your Beatitude, I give you my best wishes that the exercise of your duties at the heart of the Syrian Catholic Church will be fruitful. While we exchange the holy kiss of peace, entrusting you to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, "daughter worthy of God and beauty of human nature" (St John Damascene, *Homily on the birth of Mary*, n. 7), and to the saints of your Church, I wholeheartedly grant you all my Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to the bishops, priests, religious and all the faithful of your Patriarchate.

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