



The Holy See

MEETING AND LUNCH WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC EPISCOPATE

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Apostolic Nunciature, Kyiv

Sunday, 24 June 2001

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. I greet you and I embrace you all in the Lord! It is a great joy for me to meet you in your beloved land, to listen to you and to reflect with you upon the journey of communion and upon the promising work of evangelization being done in your communities. In the ten years since your country regained independence after the end of the Communist regime, your communities have organized themselves anew for the sake of more effective pastoral action, and they now look with hope to the future. I invoke upon them a new outpouring of grace from him who is – as the Servant of God Pope Paul VI said so tellingly – "the one who enlivens and sanctifies the Church, her divine breath, the wind in her sails, her principle of unity, her inner wellspring of light and strength, her support and consolation, the source of her gifts and songs, her peace and her joy, her pledge and prelude of blessed and eternal life" (General Audience, 29 November 1972, *Insegnamenti* X, pp. 1210-1211).

2. The joy of today's meeting will grow still stronger in the days to come, when together we shall take part in the solemn beatification of some of your brother Bishops, who exercised their episcopal ministry in the most dangerous of circumstances. We will pay them the homage of our gratitude for having preserved intact, by their sacrifice, the heritage of Christian faith among the members of their Churches. In raising them to the honours of the altar, I wish to recall with gratitude other Pastors too who also paid dearly for their faithfulness to Christ and for their decision to remain in union with the Successor of Peter.

How can we fail to recall, among them, the Servant of God Metropolitan Andrii Sheptytsky? My revered predecessor, Pope Pius XII, declared that his noble life was cut short "not so much by his advanced age, but by the sufferings of his soul as Pastor, struck down with his flock" (AAS XLIV [1955], p. 877). Together with him, I recall Cardinal Joseph Slipyj,

first Rector of the Greek Catholic Theological Academy of Lviv, happily reopened in recent times. This heroic confessor of the faith suffered the hardship of imprisonment for eighteen long years.

Among you there are still priests and Bishops who were imprisoned and persecuted. In embracing you with deep emotion, dear Brothers, I give praise to God for your faithful witness. It encourages me to accomplish my own service to the universal Church with ever more courageous dedication. I make my own the words which you say when you celebrate the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom: "We give ourselves, each of us, and our entire life to Christ, our God". This is what the martyrs and the confessors of the faith teach us. It is a lesson which we too must learn and live as Pastors of the flock which God has entrusted to us.

3. It is true that it is the task of the whole Church to preserve and pass on the heritage of faith. But it is the solemn duty of Pastors to be trustworthy guides, enlightened teachers and exemplary witnesses for the Christian people. This special responsibility of ours is referred to in the theme to be addressed by the Synod of Bishops of the Greek Catholic Ukrainian Church this year: *"The person and responsibility of the Bishop"*. On this point, allow me in a spirit of fraternal service to offer you some personal reflections in today's meeting, which brings together both Eastern and Latin Bishops.

First of all, in union with you, who have prime responsibility for your Churches, I wish to give thanks to God for the witness given by Catholics in this land, where the Church shows forth her divine and human reality, embellished by the genius of Ukrainian culture. Here the Church breathes with the two lungs of the Eastern and Western traditions. Here there is a fraternal meeting between those who draw from the sources of Byzantine spirituality and those who are nourished by Latin spirituality. Here the deep sense of mystery which suffuses the holy liturgy of the Eastern Churches and the mystical succinctness of the Latin Rite come face to face and mutually enrich each other.

Living as members of the one Church, yet respectful of different ritual traditions, you have a great opportunity to take part as it were in an important "ecclesial workshop" aimed at building unity in diversity. This is the best way to respond to the many and complex pastoral challenges of the present time. In this search, I invite you who are members of the Synod of Bishops of the Greek Catholic Ukrainian Church and you who are Bishops of the Ukrainian Episcopal Conference to make your distinctive contributions in close and active cooperation. With one heart, proclaim the Gospel of Christ, overcoming every temptation to division and disagreement. Let the only "competition" between you, dear Brother Bishops, be in vying in esteem for one another (cf. *Rom 12:10*) and in striving for holiness.

Foster communion between yourselves and with your priests in a climate of affection, concern and respectful and fraternal dialogue. Success in the work of evangelization depends in large part upon the quality of these relationships.

4. In the last ten years, your Churches have known an extraordinary flourishing of vocations to the priestly and religious life. This calls for special care in the spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation of those called to the priesthood or the consecrated life. It is necessary first of all to ensure that future priests have a deep spirituality, a rigorous philosophical and theological preparation, and a solid introduction to pastoral life, anchored in the enduring values of the Catholic tradition but attentive to the signs of the times. An essential condition for achieving these goals is the presence in seminaries and houses of formation of first-rate educators and highly trained teachers, who can ensure a solid intellectual and spiritual foundation for the priests of tomorrow. The same care needs to be given to the formation of members of

Institutes of consecrated life, especially Religious women.

Another fundamental task for your Churches is a comprehensive, competent and up-to-date catechesis of adults and young people. In this regard, you will find great help in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which is a providential means of presenting the Catholic faith in an ordered and complete way to those near and far. It should be remembered, however, that catechetical instruction is only one element in the much wider process of Christian initiation, which includes, alongside proclamation of the truths of the faith, education in personal and liturgical prayer, the experience of fraternal communion and training for service in the Church. Only an integral Christian formation can lead to the specific goal of catechesis, which "is to develop, with God's help, an as yet initial faith, and to advance in fullness and to nourish day by day the Christian life of the faithful, young and old", so that the Lord's disciples can learn "to think like him, to judge like him, to act in conformity with his commandments, and to hope as he invites us to" (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 20).

5. In recent years, which have been marked by rapid and profound social change in Ukraine as elsewhere, the family has been passing through a severe crisis, as we see in the large number of divorces and the widespread practice of abortion. Let the family therefore be one of your pastoral priorities. In particular, be concerned to lead Christian families to a powerful experience of God and to a full awareness of the Creator's plan for marriage so that, renewing the spiritual fabric of their life together, they can help improve the quality of society as a whole.

Pastoral care of the young is linked to the evangelization of the family. The models of hedonistic and materialistic life often presented by the mass media, the crisis of values affecting the family, the illusion of an easy life without effort, the problems of unemployment and uncertainty about the future often create serious disorientation in young people, making them susceptible to ephemeral visions of life stripped of values or to worrying forms of escapism. Energy and resources must be invested in their human and Christian formation. In this regard, I was pleased to learn that you plan to establish an Institute of Social Sciences, which will provide a deeper understanding of the Church's social teaching. This is an initiative which seems very timely, and I am therefore glad to offer my encouragement and blessing.

5. Venerable Brothers, before you there stretches an important time which will determine the "quality" of the Church's presence in Ukraine in the next millennium. During the Communist persecution, relations between the Greek Catholic Church and the Latin Catholic Church were exemplary, and this provided the solid basis for the subsequent flourishing of the Church. Treasuring that experience, you must now continue to work together in order to carry out the demanding task of the new evangelization. May your Churches, as is already happening in various pastoral situations, be successful in finding structured forms of cooperation and mutual assistance in the field of catechesis, in Catholic centres of learning, in the mass media, and in the vast and complex sector of human development. In every circumstance, let Catholics be one in heart and open to dialogue and mutual solidarity.

The Synod of the Greek Catholic Ukrainian Church embraces many faithful in the diaspora, and this presents new pastoral challenges. To respond to these, it is again essential to be united. There must be effective unity, first of all among the Bishops and priests, in the light of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council which invites Bishops to consider priests as "brothers and friends" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7). Then this unity will go on to embrace consecrated men and women and committed lay people, for the spiritual welfare of the entire mystical Body of Christ.

6. This deep experience of communion within the Catholic Church will doubtless stimulate appropriate forms of fraternal cooperation with our Orthodox brethren, so that together we can respond to contemporary man's quest for truth and joy, which Jesus Christ alone can fully satisfy. Ecumenical dialogue must therefore be an indispensable priority for believers and for the Churches in Ukraine. The division of Christians into different confessions represents one of the greatest challenges of our time. We have a long way to go to reach full reconciliation and visible communion among Christ's disciples, but the experience of the past helps us to look to the future with confidence.

The thirst for unity has become more intense since the Second Vatican Council, and today awareness of the need for courageous understanding and closer cooperation is growing in all Christians. As the Successor of Peter, I encourage and exhort you today, dear Brother Bishops, to pursue this path and I assure you of the Holy See's support for your generous efforts. The Pope is with you in your daily task of serving the faithful and his prayer accompanies you. With these heartfelt sentiments, I entrust you, your Churches, and the plans and hopes of the People of God in Ukraine to the Mother of God in heaven, and I cordially impart my blessing.