



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO PROF. OGHNJAN GERDJKOV
BULGARIAN PARLIAMENT PRESIDENT**

Monday, 24 May 2004

Mr President,

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. In the context of your traditional visit to commemorate Sts Cyril and Methodius who are honoured in the ancient Basilica of St Clement, you wanted to meet in order to offer me your good wishes for my 84th birthday. I appreciate and am grateful for your affectionate gesture and warmly welcome you.

I would like to thank you, Mr President of the National Assembly, for your cordial words on behalf of all. To reciprocate, I would be grateful if you would kindly convey my respectful good wishes to the President of the Republic and my sentiments of affection to the beloved Bulgar People, as I remember my happy Visit to your Country two years ago.

2. I extend a special greeting to your venerable Patriarch, His Holiness Patriarch Maxim, and to the members of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. May the example of the holy brothers of Thessalonica sustain everyone's efforts to reinforce the spiritual values that give the soul of the Bulgar People its identity and strength!

Several years ago your Country rediscovered its place on the international scene and is journeying on towards freedom and democracy, also seeking to consolidate its own inner harmony. It is currently engaged in a patient ongoing effort to join the institutions of the European Union permanently. In this regard, I hope that Bulgaria will be able to achieve its legitimate aspirations and make its own contribution to building Europe, thanks to its cultural and spiritual riches that

derive from age-old traditions.

To this end, I ask God to bless Bulgaria, the *Land of Roses*, and to grant that all its inhabitants may live and grow in serenity and peace.

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