



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

***HOLY FATHER'S ADDRESS
ON HIS ARRIVAL IN BUCHAREST***

Friday, 7 May 1999

*Mr President, Distinguished Government Representatives,
Patriarch Teoctist,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. Today I have come with great joy to Romania, a country very dear to me which I have wanted to visit for a long time. With deep emotion I kissed its soil, grateful first of all to almighty God, who in his wise goodness granted me to see this wish come true.

I also express my gratitude to you, Mr President, for your repeated invitation and the courteous words expressing the sentiments of your co-workers and of all the Romanian people. I deeply appreciated your cordial words of welcome and cherish them in my heart as I remember with gratitude the visit you made to me in 1993 as rector of the University of Bucharest and president of the Conference of University Rectors of Romania. I see all the citizens represented in you, the first citizen of this noble nation, and I have a great desire to give them a warm greeting of brotherhood and peace, from the residents of the capital to the inhabitants of the most remote villages.

2. In a special way I thank Your Beatitude Teoctist, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, for your fraternal remarks and for your kind invitation to visit the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Church to which the majority of the people in your country belong. It is the first time that divine Providence has offered me the opportunity to make an apostolic journey to a predominantly Orthodox nation and this certainly could not have happened without the willing and fraternal acquiescence of the Holy Synod of the venerable Romanian Orthodox Church and without the

consent of Your Beatitude, with whom tomorrow and on Sunday I will have special and long-awaited meetings.

At this historic moment, I cannot fail to recall the visit you made to me at the Vatican 10 years ago, showing your firm intention to establish in a free way those friendly ecclesial relations which seemed beneficial to God's People. I trust that my visit will help heal the wounds inflicted on the relations between our Churches in the last 50 years and will open a season of trusting mutual collaboration.

3. Lastly, I warmly greet you, venerable Archbishop Lucian Mureșan of Făgăraș and Alba Iulia and President of the Romanian Episcopal Conference, and all of you, Brother Bishops of the Byzantine-Romanian rite and the Latin rite, with a special greeting to Archbishop Ioan Robu of Bucharest. I again express all my gratitude to you for the kind insistence with which you invited me to visit you. I am truly happy that this dream has come true today, and I thank the Lord with you.

Here I am among you at last, a pilgrim of faith and hope. I embrace you all with affection and deep feeling, dear Catholic brothers and sisters from every community and Diocese, priests, consecrated persons and lay people, and I greet you in the words of the Apostle Paul: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Co 1:3).

My visit is meant to strengthen those ties between Romania and the Holy See which were so important for the history of Christianity in the region. As you know, tradition has it that the faith was brought to these lands by Peter's brother, the Apostle Andrew, who sealed his untiring missionary work with martyrdom in Patras. Other eminent witnesses to the Gospel, such as Sabas the Goth, Nicetas of Remesiana from Aquileia, and Laurence of Novae continued the work, and during the persecutions of the first centuries many Christians suffered martyrdom: they are the Daco-Roman martyrs such as Zoticus, Attalus, Kamasis and Philip, whose sacrifice helped the Christian faith sink deep roots in your land.

The seed of the Gospel, fallen on fertile ground, produced abundant fruits of holiness and martyrdom during these two millenniums. I am thinking of St John Cassian and Dionysius Exiguus, who helped pass on the spiritual, theological and canonical treasures of the Greek East to the Latin West, to the holy King Stephen, "a true athlete of the Christian faith" as Pope Sixtus IV called him, and of so many other faithful servants of the Gospel, including the prince and martyr, Constantin Brâncoveanu and more recently, the numerous martyrs and confessors of the faith in the 20th century.

4. Dear brothers and sisters of Romania! In this century now drawing to a close your country has experienced the horrors of harsh totalitarian systems, sharing the sufferings that were the lot of many other European countries. The communist regime suppressed the Church of the Byzantine-

Romanian rite united with Rome and persecuted Bishops and priests, men and women religious and lay people, many of whom paid with blood for their fidelity to Christ. Some survived the tortures and are still with us. My heartfelt thoughts turn to the worthy and beloved Cardinal Alexandru Todea, Archbishop emeritus of F^g and Alba Iulia, who spent 16 years in prison and 27 under house arrest. As I pay homage to him, who in his illness, accepted with Christian patience from God's hands, is continuing his faithful service to the Church, I would also like to give due recognition to the members of the Romanian Orthodox Church and of other Churches and religious communities who suffered similar persecutions and grave restrictions. Death united our brothers and sisters in faith in the heroic witness of martyrdom: they have left us an unforgettable lesson of love for Christ and his Church.

5. Thanks be to God, after the harsh winter of communist domination came the springtime of hope. With the historic events of 1989 Romania too began a process of re-establishing a State governed by law with respect for freedom, including religious freedom. Although this process does not lack obstacles, it must be continued, while safeguarding the rule of law and consolidating democratic institutions. I hope that in this effort of social renewal, your nation will not lack the political and financial support of the European Union, to which Romania belongs by reason of its history and culture.

To heal the wounds of a recent bitter and painful past, one needs patience and wisdom, a spirit of initiative and honesty. This tiring but exalting task belongs to everyone; it is a challenge especially for you, dear young people, who are the future of this generous people. Do not be afraid to accept your responsibilities courageously and look to the future with confidence. For her part, the Catholic Church is ready to make her contribution, doing all she can to help form citizens who will be attentive to the true requirements of the common good.

Romania, bridge between East and West, crossroads between Central and Eastern Europe, Romania, traditionally called by the beautiful title: "*Garden of Mary*", I come to you in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and of the Blessed Virgin. On the threshold of a new millennium, once again set your future firmly on the rock of the Gospel. With Christ's help you will play a leading role in a new season of enthusiasm and courage. You will be a prosperous nation, a fertile land of goodness, a united people and peacemakers.

May God protect you and bless you always!