



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
READ BY CARDINAL SALVATORE DE GIORGI
DURING THE CEREMONY FOR THE RETURNING TO THE CUSTODY
OF THE PATRIARCHATE OF MOSCOW
OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS**

Bari

Sunday, 1st March 2009

The Holy Father, Benedict xvi, who has asked me to represent him at this important ceremony, conveys his cordial greeting to the religious and civil authorities and to all those present, namely H.E. Giorgio Napolitano, President of the Italian Republic, H.E. Dmitry Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, the distinguished Ministers, H.E. Mark, President *ad interim* of the Department for External Ecclesiastical Relations of the Patriarchate of Moscow, and Archbishop Francesco Cacucci, Pastor of this particular Church. The Holy Father wishes first of all to renew his fervent good wishes to His Holiness Kirill I, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, asking the Holy Spirit to illumine him in his demanding ministry.

The Pope is glad that this building here in Bari complies with the needs of the Russian Orthodox devotion to St Nicholas. The Russian people have never faltered in their love for this great Saint who has always sustained them in moments of joy and difficulty. This is also testified by this Russian Orthodox Church of St Nicholas, built at the beginning of the past century to welcome pilgrims, especially those on their way to the Holy Land who stopped to venerate the Saint's relics in Bari, a meeting place between East and West. And how can we fail to recognize that this beautiful Church reawakens in us the longing for full unity and keeps alive our commitment to work for the unity of all Christ's disciples?

In fact, the history of Bari and of this Region is deeply marked by the presence of the Oriental world and ecumenical sensitivity is a characteristic trait of Apulians. And for this very reason the Holy Father Benedict XVI expresses the hope that today's event too will help ensure that Bari continues to be "a natural bridge to the East", as Pope John Paul II of venerable memory said,

making its precious contribution to the journey towards full communion among Christians.

With these sentiments, as he invokes the intercession of the Mother of God and of St Nicholas, the Pope renews his greeting to those present to whom, through me, he imparts his Blessing.

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