



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

REGINA COELI

Damascus - Sunday, 6 May 2001

Dear Brothers and Sisters from Damascus and all of Syria,

Before ending this Eucharistic Liturgy with a prayer to the Queen of Heaven, Mother of the Risen Christ, I wish to offer heartfelt thanks to all who have gathered here, around this altar, to offer the Lord our thanksgiving and to present to him our urgent petitions.

I know that all Christians in Syria have a great filial love and a profound veneration for the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, who is likewise respected by our Muslim brothers and sisters.

I deeply regret that my visit to you during these few short days does not permit me to make a pilgrimage of prayer in all the Churches dedicated to the Mother of God in this great and noble city of Damascus. I must limit myself to the two Patriarchal Cathedrals dedicated to the Dormition.

I would also have liked my pilgrimage in the footsteps of Saint Paul to have included a visit to some of the venerable Shrines of the Virgin Mother of God, such as those at nearby Seidnaya, or in Homs, Aleppo, Tartus and elsewhere. I have not forgotten that according to a pious tradition it was near Tartus that the Apostle Peter, on a journey from Jerusalem to Antioch along the Mediterranean coast, dedicated a chapel to the Virgin Mary, the first Marian shrine in Syria.

As you know, in a few days time, when I leave this city and your country, I shall continue in the footsteps of Saint Paul to Malta, where a celebrated icon of Our Lady of Damascus is piously preserved and venerated in the Greek Catholic Church in Valletta, the capital of the Island. Kneeling before that image, I will remember all of you. I promise to take to Our Lady your prayers and hopes, and I promise to ask her, as I do now, to intercede with her Divine Son for all of you

and your families.

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