



The Holy See

DIVINE LITURGY IN THE BIZANTINE-RUTHENIAN RITE ON THE OCCASION OF THE 350th ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNION OF UŽHOROD

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 27 October 1996

“Ecco quanto è buono e quanto è soave che i fratelli vivano insieme!” (Sal 132, 1).

Carissimi Fratelli e Sorelle in Cristo!

1. È veramente buono e soave per tutti noi celebrare oggi questa Divina Liturgia presso la Tomba dell’apostolo Pietro, in ricordo dei 350 anni trascorsi dall’Unione di Užhorod. Lodiamo e ringraziamo insieme il Signore per quell’importante evento, che portò al ristabilimento della piena comunione della Chiesa di rito bizantino-ruteno con la Sede Apostolica di Roma. Allo stesso tempo, vogliamo invocare ancora una volta lo Spirito Santo, perché con la sua luce e la sua forza illumini e sostenga il cammino di tutti i cristiani verso la piena unità per la quale pregò Gesù nel Cenacolo (cf. Gv 17, 20-21).

Il vincolo di amore fraterno, che ha “come pietra angolare lo stesso Cristo Gesù” (cf. Ef 2, 20), viene pienamente e perfettamente espresso nella nostra odierna partecipazione all’unica Eucaristia, che è “banchetto di comunione fraterna e pregustazione del convito del cielo” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 38). Ci rallegriamo di essere “concordi” (At 1, 14) in forza dell’effusione dello Spirito Santo, che nell’Eucaristia, mediante la grazia divina, approfondisce la comunione tra noi e con la Santissima Trinità (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15).

2. It is with immense joy that I welcome you, the Bishops, priests, men and women Religious, and lay faithful of the *Byzantine Catholic Ruthenian Church*. You are the heirs of the evangelizing work of Sts Cyril and Methodius, the Apostles of the Slavs, and at the same time heirs of the act of

ecclesiastical union celebrated 350 years ago in the chapel of the Castle of Užhorod, in Transcarpathian Ukraine, which was then in the Kingdom of Hungary. That was an act of profound faith and trust. It was a beginning full of promise. It was a gesture of spiritual courage, leading, under the impulse of the Divine Spirit, to new heights of fidelity to Christ and new efforts in the building up of his Body, which is the Church (cf. Col. 1:24).

I therefore offer thanks to God who gives us the grace of this meeting and this celebration at the tomb of the humble and glorious Apostle Peter, Prince of the Apostles and first servant of the unity of all Christians (cf. John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 94). You have come on pilgrimage from different countries and continents in order to testify to your gratitude to Christ, the Chief Shepherd (1 Pt. 5:4), for the gift of full communion between your Church and the Catholic Church: "*Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity*".

3. It was on 24 April 1646 that 63 priests of the Eparchy of Mukacheve, gathered in the Castle of Užhorod, made a profession of faith and were received into full communion with the Catholic Church by George Jakusics, Bishop of Eger. This step taken by your forebears had been a long time in preparation, and was part of that process of reunification between the Churches advanced by the Council of Florence (1439), and which found a particularly significant expression in the Union of Brest (1595), whereby the Bishops of the Metropolitan See of Kyiv had re-established communion with the See of Rome. The Ruthenian clergy at Užhorod were moved by a number of reasons, some connected with civil rights and freedom of conscience. But what those priests hoped for most of all from union with Rome was *confirmation in faith and doctrine at a time of confessional rivalry and conflict*. As an indispensable condition, they justly insisted on respect for and exercise of their own Byzantine rite under a Bishop of their own.

You have paid dearly for this union. In fact, you have never been without the experience of the Cross. Yet, as it was for St Paul whose words we have just heard, this is your boast: "*Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Gal. 6:14). From the way in which the Ruthenian faithful have remained steadfast in the face of successive trials and tribulations, the light of Christ has shone ever more brightly on your people, your families and communities in Eastern Europe and in the New World. I am deeply moved to think that you are here today with the Bishop of Rome, in communion of spirit with your martyrs, to give thanks for the new opportunities now opening up before you. Your Church exults today, as you prepare for a new stage of your journey of faith. For you too the approaching Jubilee of the Year 2000 must signal the dawn of a new era of evangelization and growth.

4. Dear Brothers and Sisters: your spiritual identity is intimately connected with *the search for the unity of all Christians*. Your special vocation is to work through love for the fulfilment of the ardent prayer which the Lord Jesus Christ himself uttered on the eve of his Passover of suffering and glory: "That they may all be one; even as you, Father are in me, and I in you ... so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn. 17:21). This you do above all in your dealings with your

Eastern brethren, "first of all. by prayer, then by the example of your lives, by scrupulous fidelity to the ancient traditions of the East, by better knowledge of each other, by working together, and by a brotherly attitude towards persons and things" (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 24). In this search, your guide and comfort will be the Most Holy Theotokos whom you venerate with tender devotion in the Liturgy, and whom you honoured this year in a special way at the Shrine of Mariapocs, in Hungary, on the third centenary of the miraculous weeping of the icon preserved there.

As clearly indicated in today's Gospel Reading, in the eyes of God the poor and humble Lazarus is to be comforted while the man rich according to the world's standards remains in anguish" (cf. Lk. 16:19-24). May you who have suffered dearly for the faith *put your whole trust in Divine Providence which has always guided your steps and will not fail you as you face the great challenges ahead*. "Peace and mercy be upon you all!" (cf. Gal. 6:16). Amen.

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