



The Holy See

JUBILEE PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE HOLY LAND (MARCH 20-26, 2000)

SPEECH OF JOHN PAUL II

ECUMENICAL MEETING IN THE
GREEK-ORTHODOX PATRIARCATE OF JERUSALEM

Jerusalem

Saturday, 25 March 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. With profound gratitude to the Most Holy Trinity I make this visit to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and I greet all of you in the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. I thank Your Beatitude Patriarch Diodoros for your fraternal hospitality and for the kind words you have addressed to us. I greet Your Beatitude Patriarch Torkom, and all the Archbishops and Bishops of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities present. It is a source of great joy to know that the Heads of Christian communities in the Holy City of Jerusalem meet frequently to deal with matters of common interest to the faithful. The fraternal spirit which prevails among you is a sign and a gift to the Christians of the Holy Land as they face the challenges before them.

Need I say that I am greatly encouraged by this evening's meeting? It confirms that we have set out on the path to knowing one another better, with the desire to overcome the mistrust and rivalry inherited from the past. Here in Jerusalem, in the City where our Lord Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead, his words ring out with special resonance, particularly the words he spoke on the night before he died: "that they may all be one; . . . so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (*Jn 17:21*). It is in response to that prayer of the Lord that we are together here, all followers of the one Lord despite our sad divisions, and all conscious that his will obliges us, and

the Churches and Ecclesial Communities we represent, to walk the path of reconciliation and peace.

This meeting reminds me of the historic meeting here in Jerusalem between my predecessor Pope Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I, an event which laid the foundations of a new era of contacts between our Churches. In the intervening years we have learned that the road to unity is a difficult one. This should not discourage us. We must be patient and persevering, and continue to move ahead without wavering. The warm embrace of Pope Paul and Patriarch Athenagoras stands out as a prophetic sign and source of inspiration, urging us on to new efforts to respond to the Lord's will.

2. Our aspiration to fuller communion between Christians takes on a special meaning in the Land of the Saviour's birth and in the Holy City of Jerusalem. Here, in the presence of the different Churches and Communities, I wish to re-affirm that the ecclesial note of universality fully respects legitimate diversity. The variety and beauty of your liturgical rites, and of your spiritual, theological and canonical traditions and institutions, testifies to the richness of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the universal Church, as it has developed down the centuries in the East and in the West. There exists a legitimate diversity which in no way is opposed to the unity of the Body of Christ, but rather enhances the splendour of the Church and contributes greatly to the fulfilment of her mission (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 50). None of this wealth must be lost in the fuller unity to which we aspire.

3. During the recent Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, in this Year of the Great Jubilee, many of you joined in prayer for greater understanding and cooperation among all Christ's followers. You did so in the awareness that all the Lord's disciples together have a common mission to serve the Gospel in the Holy Land. The more united we become in prayer around Christ, the more courageous we shall become in confronting the painful human reality of our divisions. The pilgrim path of the Church through this new century and the new millennium is the path traced out for her by her inherent vocation to unity. Let us ask the Lord to inspire a new spirit of harmony and solidarity among the Churches in facing the practical difficulties which beset the Christian community in Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

4. Fraternal cooperation among the Christians of this Holy City is no mere option; it has a significance all its own in communicating the love which the Father has for the world in sending his only Son (cf. *Jn 3:16*). Only in a spirit of mutual respect and support can the Christian presence flourish here in a community alive with its traditions and confident in facing the social, cultural and political challenges of an evolving situation. Only by being reconciled among themselves can Christians play their full part in making Jerusalem the City of Peace for all peoples. In the Holy Land, where Christians live side by side with the followers of Judaism and Islam, where there are almost daily tensions and conflicts, it is essential to overcome the scandalous impression given by our disagreements and arguments. In this City it should be eminently possible for Christians, Jews

and Muslims to live together in brotherhood and freedom, in dignity, justice and peace.

5. Dear Brothers in Christ, it has been my intention to give a clearly ecumenical dimension to the Catholic Church's celebration of the Jubilee Year 2000. The opening of the Holy Door at the Basilica of Saint Paul- outside-the-Walls, at which so many Churches and Ecclesial Communities were represented, symbolized our passing together through the "door" which is Christ: "I am the door, if any one enters by me, he will be saved" (*Jn* 10:9). Our ecumenical journey is precisely this: a journey in Christ and through Christ the Saviour to the faithful fulfilment of the Father's plan. With God's grace the Two Thousandth Anniversary of the Incarnation of the Word will be a "favourable time", a year of grace for the ecumenical movement. In the spirit of the Old Testament Jubilees, this is a providential time for us to turn to the Lord in order to ask forgiveness for the wounds which the members of our Churches have inflicted upon one another down the years. This is the time to ask the Spirit of Truth to help our Churches and Communities to engage in an ever more fruitful theological dialogue, which will enable us to grow in the knowledge of the truth and come to the fullness of communion in Christ's Body. From the exchange of ideas our dialogue will then become an exchange of gifts: a more authentic sharing of the love which the Spirit unceasingly pours into our hearts.

Your Beatitude reminded us of Christ's prayer on the eve of his Passion and Death. This prayer is his last will and testament, and it challenges us all. What will be our response? Dear Brothers in Christ, with hope-filled hearts and unfailing trust, let us make the Third Christian Millennium the Millennium of our new-found joy in the unity and peace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.