



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF THE HOLY LAND
AT THE MEETING ON THE ISSUE
"THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANS IN THE HOLY LAND"**

Thursday, 13 December 2001

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

As I stated in the letter of invitation, our meeting today intends to confirm once more the interest and concern with which the Holy See follows the situation in the Holy Land and shares with special spiritual closeness in the tragedy of those peoples who for a long time have been harshly tried by acts of violence and discrimination. Likewise, the Holy See desires to witness to the concern of the whole Church for the Christians in the Holy Land, and for the Catholic community in particular, to show our shared commitment to the continuity of its millenary presence in that region and to offer its contribution to justice and reconciliation among all those who in those places have the roots of their faith.

Unfortunately, we are meeting at a time that I do not hesitate to call "dramatic", both for the peoples who live in this area and for our brothers and sisters in the faith. Indeed, they seem to be crushed by the weight of two different extremisms that, independently of the reasons that fuel them, are disfiguring the face of the Holy Land.

To inaugurate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Patriarchs and leaders of the Christian communities in the Holy Land addressed a message of faith, hope and charity to their faithful and to Christians throughout the world: a spiritual message which, from the Grotto of Bethlehem, with courage and determination, invited all the inhabitants of the Holy Land and of the whole world to live in justice and peace.

How we wished that this message would be heard and promptly put into practice! How pleased we would have been not to have to repeat it! How happy we would have been to see our Jewish and

Muslim brothers and sisters walk beside us in loving agreement and solidarity to restore the Holy Land's true face as a "crossroads of peace" and "land of peace".

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate of the Holy Land, you must shoulder the important task of continuing to be witnesses to the presence of God's love in those lands and of bearing his message in areas where the majority are Muslim or Jewish.

In your message for the beginning of the Jubilee Year (4 December 1999), stressing that your vocation consists "in being Christians in the Holy Land and not in another country of the world", you asked everyone not to let fear overcome them, and not to lose hope in the face of difficulties: "Facing all problems", we read in your touching address, "let us stand firm, with the power of God's Spirit and that of his love.... Life in the third millennium requires deep reflection on, and a greater sense of, our identity and mission, so that we may accept what God wants for us today and tomorrow in our Holy Land".

Today too, as I did at the meeting with you in Amman on 21 March 2000, I invite you to put your trust in the Lord, to remain united with him in prayer so that he, your Light, may help you guide the flock entrusted to your care.

The presence here among us of some of our confrères representing the Episcopate worldwide, shows that you are not alone in your challenging task: the whole Church is with you. The whole Church shares your concern, sustains you in your daily efforts, is close to the suffering of your faithful, and keeps hope alive through prayer. Yes, the whole Church, in this season of Advent cries: "Come Lord, visit us with your peace: your presence fills us with joy".