



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

TO H.B. IGNACE IV HAZIM,

SYRIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCH, ANTIOCH Monday, 22 October 2001

"I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother" (cf. Phlm 7).

Your Beatitude,

How true Paul's words still are today, as I treasure fond memories of my pilgrimage to Syria, and especially of the ecumenical celebration of the Word at which we presided together with our brothers in the Cathedral of the *Dormition of Our Lady* in Damascus, last 5 May! Now, Your Beatitude has come here to pay me a visit in Rome as you make your way back to your venerable see of Antioch.

Through our meetings, the Lord gives us clear signs of the brotherhood mentioned in the Letter to Philemon. Our exchanges show us that we are travelling on the right road, the one the Lord never ceases to point out to us, the road that leads to full communion. In May 1983, following in the footsteps of the Apostles Peter and Paul, who were the first to make the Word ring out in Antioch and gave their beautiful witness in Rome, you paid me your first visit in Rome so that together we could advance with determination on the path of unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God (cf. Eph 4,13). This year it was my turn to visit you, following in the footsteps of the Apostles and applying myself, like you, dear Brother, to obeying the truth, "for a sincere love of the brethren" to show that we love one another "earnestly from the heart", sustained by "the living and abiding word of God" by which we grow in our maturity for salvation (I Pt 1,22-24).

We suffer, for at times our pace is slowed down. It happens that the sweet, peaceful, compassionate and merciful love that urges us on is diminished by the habit of quarrelling, by our inability to find a common expression, by our forgetting the prayer of Christ: *"I pray ... for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one"* (Jn 17,20-21).

Your Beatitude knows what the long journey to unity and reconciliation among the brethren

implies, because you are one of the prime movers in the endeavour to bring about a *rapprochement* between the East and the West; you have supported, from the beginning, the theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the whole group of Orthodox Churches. Today we implore the Lord for the grace and strength to move beyond the setbacks to the dialogue that are due to fruitless hesitation, for the Saviour has already shown us the way, reminding us that in this world we are bound to encounter opposition to our firm conviction that has overcome the world (cf. Jn 16,33)! I know, Your Beatitude, that like me you do not cease praying, reflecting, working, persuading so that the path may be opened. Theological dialogue should not be buffeted by the wind of discouragement nor influenced by indifference nor by lack of hope.

From this viewpoint, your visit, Your Beatitude, gives us a new occasion before God and in Christ to renew and reaffirm the bonds of fraternity that unite us. I thank you and I thank all who accompany you. I know they participate in your ministry as Pastor and that they support your efforts towards reconciliation.

Your love, brothers, has brought me grace, joy and consolation. I ask you to assure the Bishops, priests and all the faithful of the Patriarchate of Antioch that the pilgrimage of the Bishop of Rome to the places where Peter and Paul preached the Word of God has not been in vain. It was a renewal of the promise I made at the beginning of my Pontificate to make the journey towards unity one of my pastoral priorities. May we be docile to the call of the Spirit who directs us towards full and visible unity, and never create obstacles to hinder the love that God bears for humanity in Jesus Christ (cf. *Address to the Cardinals and collaborators of the Roman Curia* (28 June 1985), n. 4, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 15 July 1985, p. 3; cf. Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, n. 99)! With these sentiments I express a new fraternal love for you in Christ.