



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE ASSEMBLY OF ORGANIZATIONS FOR AID
TO THE EASTERN CHURCHES (ROACO)***

Monday, 19 June 2000

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Dear Members and Friends of ROACO,*

1. I am pleased to welcome each of you and to express my sincere gratitude for this visit which you have wished to pay me on the occasion of the second yearly meeting of ROACO. I extend a cordial greeting to Cardinal Achille Silvestrini, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and President of ROACO, and I thank him for his courteous words on behalf of you all. I also affectionately greet Archbishop Miroslav Stefan Marusyn, Secretary of the Congregation, the Undersecretary and the staff, together with those responsible for the various agencies.

In recent years your work has been increasingly organized to offer a more attentive and immediate response to the requests and urgent needs of the Eastern Catholic Churches, thanks also to the contribution of the local communities, which you have fittingly sought to involve. From time to time their requests have been the object of special sessions of reflection and examination, in order to determine the pastoral priorities and to decide on the support to be given to various evangelization projects.

2. I still cherish a vivid and grateful memory of my recent Jubilee pilgrimages to Mount Sinai, Mount Nebo and the Holy Land, to which I wanted to go as the sign of a return "to the roots of the faith and of the Church", meeting Patriarchs, Bishops and priests, men and women religious, as well as the sons and daughters of the Eastern Catholic Churches.

The visit to famous places in the life of Moses, the solemn Mass in honour of St John the Baptist at the Amman stadium, the Eucharistic celebrations in the Upper Room and at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem were unforgettable moments in which "our soul [was] stirred not only by the memory of what God has done but by his very presence, walking with us once again in the land of Christ's Birth, Death and Resurrection" (*Angelus*, Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, 26 March 2000).

What the Lord allowed me to experience in those days prompts me to urge you and all the Catholic faithful to take the Christian communities of the Holy Land increasingly to heart and to support their needs, so that the names of Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem will continue to stir feelings of gratitude in the hearts of contemporary and future Christians for the ineffable Mystery which came to pass there and for the message of salvation which, thanks to the first communities of believers, spread from that land to the whole world.

3. Because of the Great Jubilee, which the Lord has enabled us to celebrate, significant delegations from the Eastern Catholic Churches have come and will come to Rome to pray with their fellow Catholics at the tombs of the Apostles and to strengthen their bonds of intense communion and brotherhood with the Apostolic See. In this way the universality of the Church, with the variety of her rites and traditions, also becomes visible in Rome.

These concrete expressions of the wealth and variety of the catholicity of Christ's Church are a pressing appeal to pursue ecumenism, an important commitment of the Great Jubilee. As I recalled in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, it is precisely from the ecumenical standpoint that this will be "a very important year for Christians to look together to Christ the one Lord, deepening our commitment to become one in him, in accordance with his prayer to the Father. This emphasis on the centrality of Christ, of the word of God and of faith ought to inspire interest among Christians of other denominations and meet with a favourable response from them" (n. 41).

4. On this particular occasion I invite you all again to make every effort to aid populations divided by fratricidal conflicts or those in the Middle East who are still searching for stable paths of justice and freedom.

The Jubilee urges us to show concrete signs of fraternal charity which open "our eyes to the needs of those who are poor and excluded.... The abuses of power which result in some dominating others must stop: such abuses are sinful and unjust" (*Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 12). Therefore, the commitment to justice and the search for resources to create a culture of solidarity and cooperation must be important objectives for you all, but especially for the Ecclesial Communities whose fraternal solidarity you convey and visibly express.

In this way, under the prudent guidance of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, the organizations you represent are strengthened as effective witnesses to the active concern of the

Churches from which they come and a prophetic sign of the commitment of the whole Church. It is by working for justice that peace is built. It is the practice of Christ's commandment of love that anticipates the new heavens and the new earth "in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pt 3: 13).

5. Dear brothers and sisters, may I express to you the gratitude of the Eastern Churches for the concrete work of Christian concern you have carried out on their behalf for so many years. In view of the ever more pressing needs, I urge you to expand your hearts to intensify the flow of active charity to which so many people look with trust.

In this year of grace, I hope that each of you will accept with a ready heart the abundant spiritual gifts which the Lord bestows for a life that is ever more generously committed to his service. May the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, to whom I entrust your valuable work for the Eastern Churches, intercede for you.

With this wish, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to your loved ones.

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