



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Saint Peter's Square
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Apostolic Journey to Cyprus

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today I wish to reflect on my Apostolic Journey to Cyprus which in many ways was in continuity with my previous Journeys to the Holy Land and to Malta. Thanks be to God this Pastoral Visit went very well, since it has felicitously achieved its object. Already in itself it was an historic event; in fact, never before had the Bishop of Rome visited that land blessed by the apostolic work of St Paul and St Barnabas and traditionally considered a part of the Holy Land. In the footsteps of the Apostle to the Gentiles I became a pilgrim of the Gospel, primarily to strengthen the faith of the Catholic communities that form a small but lively minority on the Island and to encourage them to continue on the path to full Christian unity, especially with our Orthodox brethren. At the same time I wanted to embrace in spirit all the Middle Eastern people and to bless them in the Lord's Name, invoking from God the gift of peace. I was given a warm welcome everywhere I went and I gladly take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude once again in the first place to Archbishop Joseph Soueif of Cyprus for Maronites, and to H.B. Archbishop Fouad Twal, together with their collaborators, as I renew to each one my appreciation of their apostolic action. My heartfelt gratitude then goes to the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, and first of all to H.B. Chrysostomos ii, Archbishop of Nea Justiniana and All Cyprus, whom I had the joy to embrace with brotherly affection, as well as the President of the Republic, all the Civil Authorities and all those who laudably did their utmost, in their various capacities, to ensure the success of my

Pastoral Visit.

It began on 4 June in the ancient city of Paphos where I felt enveloped in an atmosphere that seemed, as it were, a perceptible synthesis of 2,000 years of Christian history. The archaeological remains here testify to an ancient and glorious spiritual heritage that still has a strong impact on the country's life today. A moving [ecumenical celebration](#) took place at the Church of Agia Kiriaki Chrysopolitissa an Orthodox place of worship also open to Catholics and Anglicans that is located within the archaeological site. Together with the Orthodox Archbishop Chrysostomos II and the representatives of the Armenian, Lutheran and Anglican communities, we fraternally renewed our reciprocal and irreversible ecumenical commitment. I later expressed these sentiments to H.B. Chrysostomos II during our cordial Meeting at his residence, at which I also noted that the Orthodox Church of Cyprus is bound to the destiny of this people, preserving devout and grateful memories of Archbishop Makarios III, commonly considered the father and benefactor of the nation. I too desired to pay homage to him, pausing briefly by the monument in his honour that portrays him. This attachment to tradition does not prevent the Orthodox Community from engaging in the ecumenical dialogue with the Catholic community with determination; both are motivated by the sincere wish to re-establish full and visible communion between the Churches of the East and of the West.

I began the second stage of my Journey on 5 June, in Nicosia, the capital of the Island, by calling on the President of the Republic who received me with great courtesy. In [meeting the Civil Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps](#), I reaffirmed the importance of basing positive law upon the ethical principles of natural law in order to promote moral truth in public life. It was an appeal to reason, based on ethical principles and full of demanding implications for contemporary society that all too often no longer recognizes the cultural tradition on which it is founded.

[The Liturgy of the Word, celebrated at St Maron's Elementary School](#), was one of the most evocative meetings with the Catholic community of Cyprus, with its Maronite and Latin-Rite members, and enabled me to become closely acquainted with the apostolic fervour of Cypriot Catholics. It is also expressed through educational activities and social assistance. The dozens of structures that serve society as a whole are appreciated by the Government authorities as well as by the entire population. It was a festive, joyful moment enlivened by the enthusiasm of numerous children and young people. The dimension of remembrance was not lacking and made movingly perceptible the heart of the Maronite Church, which in this very year is celebrating the 1,600th anniversary of the death of its Founder, St Maron. Particularly important in this regard is the presence of some Maronite Catholics who came from the four villages of the Island where Christians are a people that suffers and hopes. I wanted to express to them my fatherly understanding of their aspirations and difficulties.

During that same celebration I was able to admire the apostolic commitment of the Latin community, guided by the solicitude of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and by the apostolic zeal

of the Friars Minor of the Holy Land, who with persevering generosity make themselves available to serving the people. Latin-Rite Catholics, very active in the area of charity, pay special attention to the workers and to the neediest. To all, Latins and Maronites alike I assure my remembrance in prayer, encouraging them to witness to the Gospel also through a patient effort of reciprocal trust between Christians and non-Christians, in order to build a lasting peace and harmony among the peoples.

At Holy Mass celebrated in the Parish Church of Holy Cross in the presence of priests, consecrated people, deacons, catechists and representatives of the Island's lay associations and movements, I wished to repeat my invitation to trust and hope. Starting from a reflection on the mystery of the Cross, I then addressed a heartfelt appeal to all the Catholics of the Middle East so that, despite the great trials and well-known difficulties, they will not give in to the hardship and the temptation to emigrate, since their presence in the region is an indispensable sign of hope. I guaranteed to them, and especially to the priests and religious, the affectionate and intense solidarity of the Church as a whole, as well as constant prayers, so that the Lord may help them always to be an active and peaceful presence.

The culminating moment of the Apostolic Journey was certainly the consignment of the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops. This event took place on Sunday, 6 June, at the Sport Centre in Nicosia, at the end of the solemn celebration of the Eucharist in which the Patriarchs and Bishops of the various ecclesial communities of the Middle East took part. The participation of the People of God was unanimous: "with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival", as the Psalm says (Ps 42[41]: 4). We experienced it in practice, partly thanks to the presence of so many immigrants who form a significant group among the Island's Catholic population, into which they have integrated without difficulty. We prayed together for the soul of the late Bishop Luigi Padovese, President of the Turkish Bishops' Conference, whose unexpected and tragic death has left us saddened and dismayed.

The theme of the Synodal Assembly for the Middle East that will be taking place in Rome next October, speaks of communion and the openness to hope: "The Catholic Church in the Middle East: Communion and Witness". In fact the important event is a gathering of the Catholic Christianity of that region, with its different rites, that at the same time seeks to renew dialogue and courage for the future. It will therefore be accompanied by the prayerful affection of the entire Church in whose heart the Middle East has a special place, since it is here that God made himself known to our fathers in the faith. However attention to other topics of our global society will not be lacking, particularly of the protagonists of public life, called to work with constant commitment to enable this region to surmount the situations of suffering and conflict that still afflict it and to rediscover peace in justice at last.

Before taking my leave of Cyprus, I wished to visit the Maronite Cathedral in Nicosia where

Cardinal Nasrallah Pierre Sfeir, Patriarch of Antiochs for Maronites, was also present. I renewed my sincere closeness and fervent comprehension to every community of the ancient Maronite Church throughout the Island, on whose shores the Maronites arrived in various periods and were often hard put to stay faithful to their specific Christian heritage, the memories of whose art and history constitute a cultural patrimony for the whole of humanity.

Dear brothers and sisters, I returned to the Vatican my heart brimming with gratitude to God and with sentiments of sincere affection and esteem for the inhabitants of Cyprus by whom I felt welcomed and understood. In the noble land of Cyprus I was able to see the apostolic work of the different traditions of the one Church of Christ and I could almost feel many hearts beating in unison just as the Journey's theme said: "One heart, one soul". The Catholic Cypriot community, in its Maronite, Armenian and Latin branches, strives ceaselessly to be of one heart and one soul, both within itself and in cordial and constructive relations with its Orthodox brethren and with the other Christian denominations. May the Cypriot people and the other nations of the Middle East, with their government leaders and the representatives of the different religions, build together a future of peace, friendship and fraternal collaboration. And let us also pray that through the intercession of Mary Most Holy the Holy Spirit may make this Apostolic Journey fruitful and enliven throughout the world the Church's mission, established by Christ to proclaim to all peoples the Gospel of truth, love and peace.

To Special Groups

I offer a warm welcome to the ecumenical study group from the School of Theology at Seton Hall University, and to the members of the International Leadership Programme for LaSallian Universities. My cordial greetings also go to the scholars and experts taking part in the international conference sponsored by the International Insolvency Institute. I greet the many student groups present, and I thank the choirs for their praise of God in song. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, especially those from Ireland, the Philippines and the United States, I invoke Almighty God's blessings of joy and peace.