



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF BULGARIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT***

Saturday, 12 November 2005

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

The first spontaneous sentiment that wells up in my heart as I accept your greeting is cordial gratitude for the affection which your Communities have expressed through you to the Successor of Peter, renewing the attestation of their faithful attachment to the *depositum* received from the Fathers.

In these days, the expressions of communion that each one of you has renewed on behalf of the clergy, Religious and faithful for whom you are responsible are a comfort to me.

Aware as I am of the ministry I am called to carry out at the service of ecclesial communion, I ask you to convey my constant concern to them for all believers in Christ.

From the conversations I have had with each one of you, I feel convinced that the Catholic Church in Bulgaria is alive and eager to offer its enthusiastic witness to Christ in the society in which it lives.

I encourage you to persevere on this path despite the limited forces at your disposal, seeking to spread the Gospel of hope and love: the Lord can always supplement any possible gaps and the meagre means you have available.

Rather than efficient organization, what counts is steadfast faith in Christ, for he also guides, governs and sanctifies his Church through your indispensable ministry.

In his inscrutable designs, God has set you to exercise your ecclesial service side by side with our

brothers and sisters of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. I hope that the good relations that exist will continue to develop for the benefit of the proclamation of the Gospel of the Son of God, the beginning and end of every Christian action.

In this regard, I ask you, venerable Brothers, to convey my cordial greeting to Patriarch Maxim, First Hierarch of the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria. Please express to him my best wishes for his health and for the happy resumption of his ministry. I still cherish lively memories of the respectful and brotherly welcome he gave to my beloved Predecessor, Pope John Paul II, during the Pastoral Visit he made to your Country.

It is necessary to continue on the journey on which you have set out, intensifying your prayers to hasten the time when we will be able to take part in one Mass to eat the one Bread of salvation.

I know well that an intense dialogue is taking place with the civil Authorities on topics of common interest. I am glad about it because through everyone's commitment, it will be possible to identify the problems to be faced together and the ways to take, according to the practical opportunities for the best possible good of all the Bulgarian People, who rightly feel they belong to the great family of the European Continent.

As it consists of various cultural and religious elements, Bulgaria can become an example of wise integration, collaboration and peaceful coexistence. And the Catholic Community, although a minority in the context of the Country, can carry out the task of generously witnessing to the universal charity of Christ.

After the sorrowful period of Communist oppression, the Catholics who persevered with lively fidelity in their attachment to Christ now feel the urgent need to consolidate their own faith and to spread the Gospel in all social milieus, especially where there is the most glaring need for Christian proclamation.

I am thinking, for example, of the considerable drop in the birth rate, the high percentage of abortions, the frailty of so many families and the problem of emigration. I am pleased to know that the Catholic Church in Bulgaria is deeply involved in the area of social assistance, so as to meet the needs of the numerous poor.

I encourage you, venerable Brothers to continue on this path of service to the Bulgarian People, who are dear to me.

Do not be afraid also to suggest to the young generations the ideal of total consecration to Christ, to contribute increasingly to the spread of the Kingdom of God.

Persevere, likewise, with the help of other Churches and Catholic organizations, in your efforts to

equip your Communities with the structures you deem useful for pastoral activities and the exercise of Christian worship. In this regard, I have learned with special pleasure that the reconstruction of the Latin Cathedral Church of Sofia, dedicated to St Joseph, is nearing completion.

Venerable Brothers, trusting in your prayerful remembrance to the Lord, I assure you in turn of my special prayers to the One who is the true Spouse of the Church which he loves, protects and nourishes: Jesus Our Lord, the one Son of the Living God.

With these sentiments, I very warmly impart my Blessing to you, to your priests, to your men and women religious and to all the people whom God has entrusted to your care.

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