



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PATRIARCHAL ARMENIAN SYNOD
AND TO ARMENIAN PILGRIMS***

*Vatican's Clementine Hall
Monday, 20 March 2006*

*Your Beatitude,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I greet you with joy and offer you my cordial welcome! You have come to Rome from various parts of the world, bringing with you the knowledge that you belong to an ancient and noble Church which contributes with her spiritual treasures to enriching the beauty of Christ's Bride.

Thank you, Your Beatitude, for the fervent expressions of communion that you have addressed to me on behalf of the Synod of Bishops of the Armenian Catholic Church and everyone present. You have wished to recall the many signs of kindness and concern with which my Predecessors have treated your ancient and venerable Church.

At the same time, the strong attachment to the See of Peter, sometimes to the point of martyrdom, which your Community has always shown in a reciprocal and fruitful relationship of faith and affection must also be recognized. This is another reason why I want to express my deep gratitude.

The Armenian Church, whose reference is the Patriarchate of Cilicia, certainly shares fully in the historical vicissitudes which the Armenian People have experienced down the centuries. In particular, she shares in the anguish it suffered in the name of the Christian faith in the years of the terrible persecution that in history recalls with sorrowful significance "*metz yeghèrn*", the great evil.

In this regard, how can we forget Leo XIII's numerous invitations to Catholics to go to the aid of the Armenian population in need and suffering? Nor can we forget, as you appropriately emphasized, Pope Benedict XV's decisive interventions when he deplored with deep emotion the: *"Miserrima Armeniorum gens prope ad interitum adducitur"* (AAS, VII, 1915, 510).

The Armenians, who always strove to fit into the societies in which they found themselves with their hard work and their dignity, still continue today to witness their fidelity to the Gospel.

Indeed, the Armenian Catholic Community is scattered in many countries, even outside the Patriarchal territory. Taking this into account, the Apostolic See has established Eparchies or Ordinariates wherever necessary for their pastoral care. Providence set the Patriarchate for Armenian Catholics in the Middle East, in Cilicia, and subsequently in Lebanon: all the Armenian Catholic faithful look to it as a firm reference point for their age-old cultural and liturgical tradition.

Then, we see how various Churches which recognize St Gregory the Illuminator as their common Founding Father are divided among themselves, although in recent decades they have all resumed a cordial and fruitful dialogue in order to rediscover their common roots. I encourage this rediscovered brotherhood and collaboration, and I hope that new initiatives for a common journey towards full unity will spring from it.

Even if historical events have witnessed the fragmentation of the Armenian Church, divine Providence will ensure that one day she will return to being united with one Hierarchy in fraternal harmony within and in full communion with the Bishop of Rome.

The celebration of the 1,700th anniversary of the Armenian Church, in which my beloved Predecessor, John Paul II, took part, was a comforting sign of this hoped-for unity. The Lord's love for his pilgrim Church will be able, in time, to offer Christians - this is our confident hope - the necessary means to achieve his pressing desire: *"ut unum sint"*. Let us all be instruments at Christ's disposal. May he, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, grant that we persevere, sparing no effort, so that there may be one flock under one Pastor as soon as possible.

Dear brothers and sisters, with these sentiments I invoke upon you, your communities and the Armenian People the heavenly intercession of Mary Most Holy, who, as St Nerses Shnorali liked to say, is "a place of the uncircumscribed Word, the land sealed on every side in which the Light, the dawn of the Sun of justice, dwells".

May you also be sustained by the protection of St Gregory the Illuminator and of the Saints and Martyrs who have witnessed to the Gospel down the centuries.

Lastly, may you be accompanied by the Blessing that I warmly impart to you and to all your People as a pledge of the Successor of Peter's constant affection for all Armenians.

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