



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE ARMENIAN,
CHALDEAN AND LATIN RITE CHURCHES
IN IRAN ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT***

*Small Throne Room
Friday, 16 January 2009*

Dear and Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

I receive you this morning with joy and affection. I greet in particular Archbishop Ramzi Garmou of Tehran for Chaldeans and President of the Iranian Bishops' Conference, who has just delivered a beautiful address to me on your behalf. You are the Ordinaries of the Armenian, Chaldean and Latin Rite Churches. You thus represent, dear Brothers, the riches of unity in diversity that exists in the heart of the Catholic Church and to which you bear a daily witness in the Islamic Republic of Iran. I take this opportunity to express my cordial greetings to the whole Iranian people, which you will convey to your communities on my behalf. Today, as in the past, the Catholic Church does not cease to encourage all who have at heart the common good and peace among nations. Nor will Iran, the bridge between the Middle East and sub-continental Asia, for its part, fail to fulfil this vocation.

Above all I am very glad to be able to express to you personally my warm appreciation of the service you carry out in a land where the Christian presence is ancient and where it developed and was maintained during the various vicissitudes of Iranian history. I also extend my gratitude to the priests and the men and women religious who work in this vast and beautiful country. I know how necessary their presence is and how precious is the spiritual and human assistance that they guarantee to the faithful through direct daily contact, and how they offer a beautiful witness to all.

I am thinking in particular of their care for the elderly and the assistance they give to specific social categories that are particularly in need. I also greet through you all those who are involved in

Church institutions. I would like further to recall the fine contribution made by the Catholic Church, particularly through *Caritas*, to the task of reconstruction after the terrible earthquake that hit the Bam region. I wish to remember all the Catholic faithful whose presence in the land of their ancestors evokes the biblical image of the leaven in the dough (cf. Mt 13: 33) which causes bread to rise, giving it taste and consistency. Through you, dear Brothers, I would like to thank them all for their constancy and perseverance and also to encourage them to remain faithful to the faith of their fathers and to stay connected to their land in order to collaborate in the nation's development.

Although your various communities live in different contexts, they have certain problems in common. They must develop harmonious relations with the public institutions that with God's grace will gradually deepen their knowledge and permit the Catholic communities to carry out their mission as Church in mutual respect and for the good of all. I encourage you to promote all initiatives that foster better reciprocal knowledge. Two paths may be explored: that of cultural dialogue, a treasure of Iran that has existed for several thousand years, and that of charity.

The latter will illuminate the former and be its driving force. "Love is patient and kind... love bears all things... love never ends..."(1 Cor 13: 4 and 8). To achieve this goal and especially for the spiritual progress of your respective faithful you need labourers to sow and to gather in the harvest: priests and men and women religious. Your communities, reduced in number, do not permit the development of numerous local vocations which, nevertheless, must be encourage. Moreover, the difficult mission of priests and religious obliges them to travel to reach the different Christian communities scattered throughout the country. To overcome this practical difficulty and others, the constitution of a bilateral commission with your authorities is being studied to permit the development of relations and mutual knowledge between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Catholic Church.

I would like to mention another aspect of your daily life. Christians in your communities sometimes seek more favourable opportunities elsewhere for their professional life and the education of their children. This legitimate desire is found among the inhabitants of numerous countries and is anchored in the human condition which always seeks a better future. The situation spurs you, as Pastors of your flock, to offer special help to those members of the faithful who remain in Iran and to encourage them to keep in touch with their family members who have chosen a different destiny.

The latter will also be able to preserve their identity and the faith of their ancestors. You have a long way to go. The journey demands great perseverance and patience. The example of God who is merciful and patient with his people will be your model and will help you to cover the necessary ground for dialogue.

Your Churches are heirs to a noble tradition and a long Christian presence in Iran. They have contributed, each in her own way, to the life and edification of the country. They wish to continue

their work of service in Iran, keeping their own identity and living their faith freely. I do not forget your country and the Catholic communities present on the territory in my prayers, and I ask God to bless and to help them.

Dear Brothers in the episcopate, I would like to assure you of my affection and my support. I would be grateful if, on your return to Iran, you would tell your priests, your men and women religious, as well as your faithful that the Pope is close to them and is praying for them. May the Virgin Mary's motherly tenderness accompany you in your apostolic mission and may the Mother of God present to her divine Son all the intentions, all the anxieties and all the joys of the faithful of your different communities! I invoke a special Blessing upon you in this Year dedicated to St Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

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