



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO HIS BEATITUDE BÉCHARA BOUTROS RAÏ
PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH FOR MARONITES**

Clementine Hall

Thursday, 14 April 2011

*Your Beatitude,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Sons and Daughters of the Maronite Church,*

This first visit to the Successor of Peter after your election to the Patriarchal See of Antioch for Maronites is a privileged event for the universal Church. I am delighted to receive you here with the Maronite Bishops, priests, consecrated people and faithful to solemnise the *Ecclesiastica Communio* which I granted to you by [Letter on 24 March](#). Your election a few days after the Holy Year, promulgated to celebrate the 1,600th anniversary of the death of St Maron, appears as the most eminent fruit of the numerous graces he obtained for his Church.

I warmly greet all of you who have come to gather round your Patriarch for the great moment of the fraternal communion and the indefectible unity of the Maronite Church with the Church of Rome, underlining thereby the importance of the visible unity of the Church in her catholicity.

In the absence of Cardinal Nasrallah Pierre Sfeir, may I be permitted to express my affection and gratitude to him for having devoted 25 years of his life to guiding the Maronite Church as Patriarch through the upheavals of history.

This Ecclesiastical Communion will shortly find its most authentic expression in the Divine Liturgy where the one Body and Blood of Christ will be shared. Here is expressed the fullness of communion between the Successor of the Prince of the Apostles and the 87th Successor of St Maron, Father and Head of the Church of Antioch for Maronites, this most prestigious Apostolic See where Christ's faithful were called "Christians" for the first time! Your Patriarchal Church, her

rich spiritual, liturgical and theological tradition, part of the Antiochian tradition, always adorns the whole Church with this treasure.

Because you are at the heart of the Middle East, you have an immense mission to human beings to whom the Love of Christ hastens to proclaim the Good News of salvation. At the recent Synod which I convoked in October 2010, the urgent need to propose the Gospel anew to people who are barely familiar with it or who have drifted away from the Church was frequently mentioned.

With all the living forces present in Lebanon and in the Middle East, I know, your Beatitude, that you will have at heart to proclaim, to witness and to live this word of life in communion in order to rediscover the fervour of the first faithful who “devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

This region of the world, which the Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles and Christ himself blessed by their presence and their preaching, aspires to the enduring peace that the word of Truth can establish when it is welcomed and lived out.

You pursue this task through the human and spiritual, moral and intellectual education of young people, thanks to your scholastic and catechetical network whose quality I know. I ardently hope that your role in their formation may be ever better recognized by society so that it is possible to transmit the fundamental values to them without discrimination. May today’s young people thus become responsible men and women in their families and in society, to build greater solidarity and brotherhood among all the members of the nation. Please convey to all the young my esteem and affection, by reminding them that the Church and society are in need of their enthusiasm and hope.

I therefore I invite you to intensify the formation of the priests and numerous young people whom the Lord calls in your eparchies and religious congregations. By their teaching and their lives, may they be authentic witnesses of the Word of God to help the faithful to root their life and their mission in Christ!

Your Beatitude, I address my fraternal good wishes to you that the Holy Spirit may help you in the exercise of your office. May he comfort you in difficulties and procure for you the joy of seeing your Church grow in fervour and number!

At the dawn of your ministry, I would like to repeat to you these words that Christ said to his disciples: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” (Lk 12:32).

While I address my warm greetings to all the Lebanese people, I entrust you very specially to the Intercession of Our Lady of Lebanon — since you, Your Beatitude, are a son of the Maronite

Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary — and also to that of St Maron and all the Lebanese saints and blesseds. And I wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you, and to the bishops and priests, to the men and women religious and to all the faithful of your Patriarchate.

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