



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE ASSEMBLY OF ORGANIZATIONS
FOR AID TO THE EASTERN CHURCHES (R.O.A.C.O.)**

Consistory Hall

Thursday, 20 June 2013

Dear Friends,

1. Welcome to you all! I receive you joyfully to thank the Lord, together with our brothers and sisters of the East, represented here by some of their pastors and by you, the superiors and co-workers of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, as well as the members of the Agencies of which ROACO consists. I am grateful to God for the fidelity to Christ, to the Gospel and to the Church of which Eastern-rite Catholics have given proof down the ages, facing every difficulty in Christ's name as Christians for "keeping the faith" (cf. 2 Tim 4:6-8). I am close to them with gratitude.

I extend my thanks to each one of you — and to the Churches which you represent — for all you do for them, and I reciprocate the Cardinal Prefect's cordial greeting. Like my Predecessors, I wish to encourage and support you in the exercise of charity which for disciples of Jesus is their sole reason for pride. This charity flows from the love of God in Christ: its summit is the Cross, a luminous sign of God's mercy and charity for all, which was poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5).

2. It is my duty to press for charitable action, which is inseparable from the faith in which the Bishop of Rome, Successor of the Apostle Peter, is bound to strengthen his brethren. The Year of Faith impels us to profess the love of God in Christ Jesus even more convincingly. I ask you to accompany me in the task of combining faith with charity, which is inherent in the Petrine Service.

St Ignatius of Antioch has that essential expression with which he defines the Church of Rome: "the Church which presides in charity" (*Letter to the Romans*, greeting). I therefore ask you to cooperate "in faith and in the charity of Jesus Christ our Lord" (*ibid.*), reminding you that our action will only be effective if it is rooted in faith and nourished by prayer, especially by the Blessed

Eucharist, the Sacrament of faith and charity.

3. Dear friends, this is the first witness we must offer in our service to God and to our brethren. Only in this way will all our actions be fruitful. Continue your intelligent and caring work in implementing well thought-out and coordinated projects that give formation appropriate priority, especially to youth. However, never forget that these projects must be a sign of that profession of God's love which constitutes the Christian identity.

The Church, in the multiplicity and riches of her members and of her activities, does not find her security in human means. The Church belongs to God, she trusts in his presence and in his action and brings to the world the force of God which is the power of love. May the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* be an invaluable reference to you in your service.

4. The presence of the Patriarchs of Alexandria for Copts and of Babylon for Chaldeans, as well as of the Papal Representatives in the Holy Land and in Syria, of the Auxiliary Bishop of the Patriarch of Jerusalem and of the Custos of the Holy Land, takes my heart to the Holy Places of our Redemption and rekindles within me my deep ecclesial concern for the situation of so many brothers and sisters who live in insecurity and violence that seem never-ending and spare neither the innocent nor the weakest.

We believers are asked for constant and trusting prayer, that the Lord may grant the longed-for peace, accompanied by sharing and practical solidarity.

I would like once again from the depths of my heart to appeal to the leaders of nations and of international organizations, to the believers of every religion, and to men and women of good will for an end to all suffering, all violence, and all religious, cultural and social discrimination.

May conflict that sows death make room for encounter and reconciliation that bring life. To all who are suffering I say forcefully: never lose hope! The Church is beside you, accompanies you and sustains you! I ask you to do all you can to alleviate the serious needs of the stricken populations, especially those of Syria, the people of beloved Syria, refugees, ever more numerous.

Ignatius of Antioch himself asked the Christians of Rome: "Remember in your prayers the Church of Syria... Jesus Christ will watch over her and your charity" (*Letter to the Romans IX, 1*). I, too, repeat this to you: remember in your prayers the Church of Syria.... Jesus Christ will watch over her and your charity.

I entrust the innumerable victims to the Lord of life and I implore the Most Holy Mother of God to comfort all who are in "great tribulation" (Rev 7:14). It is true, Syria is passing through great tribulation.

To each one of you, to the Agencies and to all the Eastern Churches I warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing.

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