



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF BULGARIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Thursday, 13 February 2014

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I welcome you with joy on the occasion of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. Through you I see and honour the faith and love of the faithful people who live in Bulgaria. Thanks be to God and to the group effort of various ecclesiastics, bishops and priests, religious, catechists and faithful lay people, we are witnessing a reawakening of activities and initiatives which demonstrate the vitality of the Catholic faithful of your Country. I am especially referring to several events that the Church in Bulgaria has launched in recent years: the 2010 Jubilee of the Apostolic Exarchate for Catholics of the Byzantine-Slavic Rite celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Union with the Apostolic See of Rome; the scientific-commemorative conference on the work of Archbishop Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, Apostolic Visitor and Delegate to Bulgaria in 1925-34; the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the martyrdom of Blessed Passionist Bishop, Evgenij Bossilkov. Furthermore, during the recent Year of Faith, some meaningful moments took place including the national meeting of Catholics of Bulgaria, the national youth day and and a study conference on the [Second Vatican Council](#).

These initiatives confirm that the Catholic communities, which belong to both the Latin Church and the Greek-Catholic Church, although they constitute a minority in the country, and dutifully carry forward their mission of witness both of natural moral values and of the Gospel of Christ in a society marked by many spiritual voids left behind by the former atheist regime or by the uncritical reception of cultural models inherent in the suggestions of a certain practical materialism. I urge you to walk with courage along this path, striving also to implement in your country the missionary transformation that the Church is called to bring about in the entire world. This calls for a spiritual and pastoral conversion, one which begins with the awareness that, by virtue of Baptism, we are

all missionary disciples, sent by the Lord to evangelize joyfully and spiritually, and also by appreciating the precious treasure of popular piety. This renewed missionary commitment also includes a social aspect which is based on the social doctrine of the Church and whose priorities are social inclusion of the poor, the duty to the common good and peace in society.

In this regard it is very important that the civil institutions recognize the role of the Holy See, as a spiritual and moral authority in the international community, and value the presence of the Catholic Church in the union of the Bulgarian nation and the contribution that she offers to the service of the common good and the progress of the country.

May the many courageous testimonies of faithfulness to Christ and to the Church rendered in dramatic periods and the path taken over these past two decades to recover freedom, fill you with gratitude to the Lord and instill trust in his provident action throughout history. At the same time, I urge you to a renewed and united commitment to the formation of the faithful, by promoting both appropriate catechesis with special care for the youth apostolate and vocations, as well as for a priestly brotherhood, so that favourable conditions may help the faith to mature as well as generous openness to the missionary dimension.

Your communities, dear Brothers, live and work next to those of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Therefore, I ask you to convey my cordial greeting to Patriarch Neofit, who in a few days will celebrate the first anniversary of his canonical election, and I warmly invite you to continue the efforts to promote an ever more intense and fraternal dialogue with the Orthodox Church. In mutual and prayerful listening to the Word of God, I hope that the hearts and minds of all may open so that the hope of realizing a celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice together may become ever more possible, that Sacrifice in keeping with the Word of Our Lord, who on the eve of his death prayed to the Father that his disciples “may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me” (Jn 17:23).

On 27 April the canonization of [John XXIII](#) and [John Paul II](#) will be held in Rome. I am pleased that the Diocese of Sofia and Plovdiv, as well as that of Nicopoli and the Apostolic Exarchate for Catholics of the Byzantine-Slavic Rite, will be present at the solemn celebration with their supporting delegations. This is an eloquent sign of how much the first Slavic Pope made his mark on the soul and life of the Catholic community in Bulgaria, especially during his visit to your homeland in May 2002. It is also a sign of what a lasting memory Archbishop Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli left in his nine years working in Bulgaria as the Apostolic Delegate. When taking his leave of the country, he thus expressed himself: “Wherever I happen to live, if someone from Bulgaria comes to my house, during the night, amidst life’s problems, he will always find a lit lamp. Knock, knock. He will not be asked if he is Catholic or Orthodox, he is a brother from Bulgaria! Enter with both arms open fraternally, a warm friendly heart, will welcome him with joy” (*Christmas Homily*, 25 December 1934). These words reveal the affection of Archbishop Roncalli Apostolic Delegate for the Bulgarian people, who amid the vicissitudes of history maintained the living flame of faith in

Christ.

Dear Brothers, I entrust your hopes and your concerns, the journey of your Churches, and the development of your earthly homeland to the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, to Sts Cyril and Methodius, evangelizers of the Slavic peoples, and to Blessed Bishop and Martyr Evgenij Bossilkov, and I invoke the Lord's blessing upon you, your priests, the men and women religious and the faithful of your dear nation of Bulgaria.