



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE SYNOD ASSEMBLY OF THE GREEK-MELKITE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Monday, 12 February 2018

[Multimedia]

*Your Beatitude,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

I thank you for your visit. The happy occasion is the public manifestation of ecclesiastical communion which will take place tomorrow morning during the Eucharistic celebration, and which I had previously accorded your Beatitude in a letter dated 22 June last, following your election as Patriarch, *Pater et Caput*, by the Synod of Bishops.

Today, just as then, dear Brother, I assure you of my constant closeness in prayer. May the Risen Christ be close to you and accompany you in the mission entrusted to you. It is a prayer which cannot be disassociated from that for beloved Syria and the entire Middle East, the region in which your Church is deeply rooted and where it carries out a valuable service for the good of the People of God. Your presence is not limited to the Middle East, but for many years now, it has extended to countries where many Melkite Greek faithful have relocated, in search of a better life. My prayers and affectionate thoughts also go to these faithful in diaspora and to their pastors.

In this difficult historical period, many Christian communities in the Middle East are called to live their faith in the Lord Jesus amid many trials. I ardently hope that with their living witness, the Melkite Greek Bishops and priests will be able to encourage the faithful to remain in the land of birth that Divine Providence desired for them. In the previously mentioned letter of June, I recalled that “in this particularly difficult time, Pastors are called upon to manifest communion, unity, closeness, solidarity and transparency before the suffering People of God”. I fraternally invite you to continue on this path. As you know, I have called for a day of prayer and fasting for peace to be held on the 23rd of this month. On that occasion I will be sure to remember in a special way Syria,

which has been struck by unspeakable suffering in the last few years.

You have come as pilgrims to Rome, to the tomb of the Apostle Peter, at the conclusion of your recent Synod Assembly which took place in Lebanon in the first days of the month. It is always a fundamental moment, a shared journey during which the Patriarch and the Bishops are called to make important decisions for the good of the faithful, also through the election of new Bishops, of Pastors who bear witness to the Risen Christ; Pastors who, as the Lord did with his disciples, revitalize the hearts of the faithful by being close to them, comforting them, serving them and their needs; Pastors who, at the same time, lead them heavenward, to “seek the things that are above, where Christ is, not things that are on earth”, (cf. Col 3:1-2). We are in great need of Pastors who embrace life with the vastness of God’s heart, who do not yield to earthly satisfactions, who are not content with things as they are, but always aiming heavenward; Pastors who are *heralds of the Almighty*, free from the temptation of staying “under the radar”, free from the restrictive measures of a lukewarm and habitual life; Pastors who are poor, not attached to money and luxury; in the midst of poor, suffering people; consistent proclaimers of Paschal hope, on a continuous journey with our brothers and sisters. While I will be happy to grant my Pontifical Assent to the Bishops elected by you, I would like to be able to experience first-hand the greatness of these horizons.

Your Beatitude, Your Excellencies, I warmly renew my gratitude to you for your fraternal visit. When you return to your Sees and meet your priests, men and women religious and faithful, remind them that they are in the Pope’s heart and prayers. May the Most Holy Mother of God, Queen of Peace, keep you and protect you. And while I have the joy of imparting my blessing to you and your communities, I ask that you please, not forget to pray for me.

Thank you!