



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 25 August 2004

**Liturgy of the Word in honour
of the Icon of the Mother of God of Kazan**

Homily

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Today, as I announced last Sunday, our traditional weekly meeting has a special profile. Indeed, here we are gathered in prayer around the *venerable Icon of the Mother of God of Kazan*, which is on the point of setting out on the return journey to Russia, which it left one day long ago.

After passing through various countries and staying a long time at the Shrine of Fatima in Portugal, it providentially arrived at the Pope's dwelling more than 10 years ago. Since then, it has found a home with me and has accompanied my daily service to the Church with its motherly gaze.

How often since that day have I called on the Mother of God of Kazan, asking her to protect and guide the *Russian people who venerate her*, and to hasten the moment when all the disciples of her Son, recognizing one another as brothers and sisters, will be able to fully restore the compromised unity.

2. From the very first, I wanted this holy Icon *to return to its own Land of Russia*, where, according to reliable historical accounts, it was for a great many years the object of profound veneration on the part of entire generations of the faithful. It was around the Icon of the Mother of God of Kazan

that *the history of that great people developed*.

Russia is a Nation which has been Christian for many centuries; it is the *Holy Rus'*. Even when hostile forces furiously attacked the Church and endeavoured to cancel the holy Name of God from human lives, that people remained profoundly Christian, *witnessing in many cases with blood* to their fidelity to the Gospel and the values it inspires.

Therefore, deeply moved, I give thanks with you to divine Providence, which today has granted me to send this holy Icon as a gift to the venerable Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

3. May the ancient image of the Mother of the Lord tell His Holiness Alexei II and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Successor of Peter's affection for them and for all the faithful entrusted to their care. May it speak of his esteem for the great spiritual tradition of which the Holy Russian Church is custodian. May it speak of the desire and firm determination of the Pope of Rome to progress with them on the journey of reciprocal knowledge and reconciliation, to hasten the day of that full unity of believers for which the Lord Jesus ardently prayed (cf. Jn 17: 20-22).

Dear brothers and sisters, join me in invoking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as I entrust her Icon to the Delegation which, in my name, will be taking the Icon to Moscow.