



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE AMERICAN BISHOPS OF THE EASTERN RITE ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT

Thursday 23 November 1978

Dear brothers, sharers in the episcopal ministry to the Church of Christ, WE GREET YOU with deep respect and affection. The Christian faithful whom you serve are citizens of a nation that is still young, yet they are heirs of two of the ancient traditions that enrich the one Catholic Church. In welcoming you we therefore embrace also the Churches in your charge, expressing our heartfelt veneration and our love for them. The Church is indeed enriched by such venerable traditions and would be much poorer without them. Their variety contributes in no small measure to her splendor. They enshrine many great artistic and cultural values, the loss of which would be sorely felt. Each of them is in itself worthy of great admiration and wonder. Yet these traditions are no mere adornment of the Church. United in brotherhood, they are important means at the disposal of the Church for displaying to the world the universality of Christ's salvation and fulfilling her mission of making disciples of all nations. The variety within brotherhood that is seen in the Catholic Church, far from being detrimental to the Church's unity, rather manifests it, showing how all peoples and cultures are called to be organically united in the Holy Spirit through the same faith, the same sacraments, and the same government. Each tradition must value and cherish the others. The eye cannot say to the hand: "I have no need of you"; for, if all were a single organ, where would the body be? The Church is Christ's body and the various parts of the body are intended to serve the good of the whole and to collaborate with each other for that end. Each individual tradition has its own contribution to make to the good of the whole. Each one's understanding of the faith is deepened by the doctrine contained in the works of the Fathers and spiritual writers of the others, by the theological riches stored in the others' liturgies as they have developed over the centuries under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and of legitimate ecclesiastical authority, and by the others' ways of living the faith that they have received from the Apostles. Each one can find support in the examples of zeal, fidelity and holiness that are provided by the others' history. The Second Vatican Council declared that "all should realize that it is of supreme importance to understand, venerate, preserve and foster the exceedingly rich liturgical and spiritual heritage of the Eastern Churches, in order faithfully to preserve the fullness of Christian tradition". The Council also declared that the Eastern Churches "entire heritage of spirituality and liturgy, of discipline and theology, in their various traditions, belongs to the full catholic and apostolic character of the Church". My brother bishops, I do most heartily respect and appreciate the venerable traditions to which you belong, and I desire to

see them flourish. I would wish every member of the Catholic Church to cherish his or her own tradition. "It is the mind of the Catholic Church that each individual Church or rite retain its traditions whole and entire, while adjusting its way of life to the various needs of time and place". You and the Churches over which you preside should accordingly treasure your heritage and take care to hand it on in its integrity to future generations. I would also wish each members of the Catholic Church to recognize the equal dignity of the other rites within her unity. Each rite is called to assist the others, working together in harmony and good order for the good of the whole and not for its own particular welfare. I give assurance of my prayers for all the members of your Churches in the United States of America. I pray also for your fellow citizens and for your brethren in the countries from which your ancestors came. For most of you those countries are close to my own native land. For one of you it means one of the most sorely tried areas in the world today, namely Lebanon, an area that deserves from all of us special prayers for the ending of enmity and oppression within it. in order that its inhabitants may be able to dwell there in peace and understanding. Let us join in invoking on all your people the blessing of Almighty God.