



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BYZANTINE-RUTHENIAN BISHOPS OF THE PROVINCE OF PITTSBURGH FROM
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Saturday, 28 November 1988

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. Through you I would like to extend warm greetings today to all the Byzantine Catholics of the Province of Pittsburgh, and at the same time to express my love and esteem for all the other Eastern-Rite Catholics in the United States. In your particular Churches there shines forth "that tradition which was handed down from the Apostles through the Fathers and which forms part of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the universal Church". Indeed, you bear faithful witness to the catholicity of the Church and to her ability to sustain and develop in the present – in continuity with the past – diverse religious traditions which derive from the one Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In your own history, acceptance of the Gospel has exercised a profound influence on your people. The Christian culture which was generated over centuries in your lands of origin and which you have inherited is a great treasure to be preserved, shared and developed organically in the present situation of your lives in the United States. Acceptance of Christ never fails to produce fruit in all sectors of human activity.

2. The celebration of the recent Marian Year has provided the Church with a special opportunity of appreciating more fully the contribution of the East to the common patrimony of the Church's worship. Here in Rome, on a number of memorable occasions we have offered the liturgy according to various rites, and in our prayer we have experienced a profound communion with all the Eastern Churches. These celebrations vividly expressed the lofty aspirations of the whole Church to adore the majesty of God and to be joined in communion with the Most Holy Trinity. The divine plan, according to which the Eternal Word took on human nature in the womb of the Virgin

Mary, continually makes possible the fulfillment of this longing.

Together we have honored the All-holy Mother of God, the archetype of the human creature's supernatural elevation to union with God in Jesus Christ. Mary, Daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son, Spouse and Temple of God the Holy Spirit, is at the very heart of the mystery of salvation. The special place that Marian piety holds in the Eastern Churches leads us to a deeper understanding of Christ, and through him, of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

3. From the very beginning of her divine motherhood, Mary takes up her role in relation to the messianic service of Christ, the Son of Man who came not to be served but to serve, and this service constitutes the foundation of that Kingdom in which "to serve" means "to reign". She who is "full of grace" expresses her joy at the gift she has received by saying: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord". As Pastors of the Church we too find joy in our life of service as we recall the challenge of the Second Vatican Council: In exercising their office of father and pastor, Bishops should stand in the midst of their people as those who serve". In this our apostolic ministry, we look to Mary as our model of total service.

Among the many tasks incumbent upon Bishops, the Second Vatican Council speaks of the obligation "to promote every activity that is of interest to the whole Church, especially that the faith may increase and the light of full truth appear to all people". The service that the laity render in this area is of immense importance and requires a persevering commitment on their part. As they pursue their specific role of consecrating from within all temporal reality they can be greatly strengthened and inspired by the example of Mary. Thus in their daily occupations, in their work and family life, they need to be invited to respond to the universal call to holiness by identifying themselves with Christ, by carrying out all their activities as perfectly as possible, and by bearing genuine witness to the Lord and his Gospel. With God's grace the laity can make their ordinary work a great act of generous and sanctifying service in union with Mary.

The Queen of Apostles is the perfect example of the union of the spiritual and apostolic life in the midst of everyday concerns. She is an incomparable source of inspiration particularly for lay women in today's world which, along with the scientific and technological development that produces material progress for some people and degradation for others, risks becoming steadily more inhuman. The family, the Church and society need that feminine "genius" which guarantees human sensitivity. Through the teaching of the Church and with the help of the Holy Spirit, women can increasingly discover in Mary the full meaning of their femininity and offer the gift of its untarnished beauty to a world in need of being humanized.

4. Dear Brothers: we are all heirs of a spiritual and civil freedom which has been won at a great price. Many of your people have personally experienced how costly liberty is, especially religious liberty. When we speak about this topic we are motivated by the truth about man and by concern for the well-being of each nation. Indeed, we have the best interests of all humanity at heart, for

religious freedom supports and guarantees all other freedoms. As I said in this year's Message for the World Day of Peace, the freedom of individuals and communities to profess and practise their own beliefs is an essential element for peace in the world.

Freedom is hampered in many ways, one of them being the pressures of a secularized cultural environment. You are faithful to your pastoral and prophetic mission when you alert your people, who so prize their religious liberty, not to let the pleasures and allurements of the world deprive them of that inner freedom which not even persecution itself could destroy in them or their forebears.

5. The presence of Eastern-Rite Catholics in America has come about both as a result of religious persecution in their homelands and through other variously motivated emigrations. Taking their situation into account, the Holy See over the years has fostered the protection and advancement of their ecclesial traditions by establishing parishes and special hierarchies in accordance with their spiritual needs.

Today, many difficult situations of economic, political and social unrest have forced millions of people to leave their homes and seek a better life elsewhere. As Pastors we must continually invite the faithful to be sensitive to the needs of the poor and of all who suffer.

The "logic of the Gospel" does not permit us to remain passive in regard to anyone in need. The love of Christ impels us therefore to defend and support the just cause of migrants, immigrants, and refugees.

6. By the will of her divine Founder, the Church is forever and essentially missionary. On the ecclesial level, your particular Churches contribute to the fulfillment of Christ's command to go forth and make disciples of all nations by displaying to the world the universality of Christ's salvation and by passing on your cherished traditions to successive generations.

Culturally, you bring the heritage of the East to a society which owes much of its formation to Western Christianity. Eastern and Western traditions in Christianity have complemented each other and produced in the fields of music, literature, the visual arts and architecture, as well as in modes of thought, the inculturation of the one and undivided deposit of faith entrusted by Christ to his Church.

The desire for unity, which is an outstanding sign of our times, is particularly strong at the level of ecumenism. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council expressly thanked God for the communion of the Eastern Churches with the See of Peter, the visible foundation of the unity of the Spouse of Christ. By helping our Orthodox brethren to reflect on the character of the relations that existed between their Churches and the Roman See before separation, your Churches contribute greatly to a constructive ecumenical dialogue. Now more than ever, you are called upon

to pray and work for building up the visible unity of the Church.

7. Dear brothers Bishops: from your exceedingly rich liturgical and spiritual tradition, with your long experience of faithfulness to Christ in the midst of changes and adversity, you draw the necessary spiritual strength to help the faithful entrusted to your care to correspond to their vocation to holiness and service in the context of the Church in the United States.

As we look forward to the third Christian millennium, let us entrust all our concerns and hopes to the Virgin Mother of God, to whom we owe the birth of Christ and who was present at the birth of the Church, which is one and universal from the beginning. The Marian Year has ended, but the period now opening up before us is a Marian event, a Marian path leading to the year 2000. As we travel this path together, with our eyes raised to her who is indeed the Star of the East, let us constantly present her to our people as a model of service, an incentive to holiness, our Mother of Perpetual Help. Upon you, dear Brothers, and upon all the Ruthenian Byzantine Catholics of the Metropolitan See of Pittsburgh and the Eparchies of Passaic, Parma and Van Nuys – as well as the faithful of all the other Eastern Churches in the United States – I invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I impart to all my Apostolic Blessing.

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