



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH

Friday, 1 December 2000

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate
of the Catholic Church of the Byzantine-Ukrainian rite!*

1. I am very pleased to receive and welcome you. I send a special greeting to Cardinal Myroslav Ivan Lubachivsky, Major Archbishop of Lviv for Ukrainians.

Through you I also greet the Ukrainian faithful of all the Christian Churches in the country. My greeting is extended as well to Ukrainians living abroad, who keep alive the religious traditions of their homeland.

2. You have come to Rome from Ukraine and the countries of the diaspora to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

I remember with deep feeling that day 10 years ago when, after almost half a century, your Ukrainian Bishops, confessors of the faith, met the Ukrainian prelates of the diaspora. It was a symbol more powerful than any word.

On that occasion we thanked the Lord because the Millennium of the Baptism of your people, celebrated in 1988, inaugurated a new era bringing important social and moral changes for you that involved recognition of the right to religious freedom for Eastern-rite Catholics and their Church, which has been in union with the See of Peter for 400 years.

In this way, the community of the People of God, which had been out-lawed in 1946, emerged from the catacombs. Your Church, by faithfully following Christ her Bridegroom, knew suffering and the cross when the cruel atheist regime decreed her suppression.

3. But now you must look ahead: God's grace spurs us to use our time well, because it is the time of salvation. The

commitment to building the Church is incumbent on us and fills us with enthusiasm. The first task is yours, Bishops of the Synod of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. This is a structure of great value and responsibility: like the Apostles, you are called to care for the whole Church; the experience of your individual Eparchies must be joined in a common plan, a global project. I am sure that these years are an important lesson for you: they teach you to work together, to bear one another's burdens, to feel that you are all jointly responsible for leading your communities. Thirst for God is increasing; people are in a hurry to be led on Christ's path. I am sure that you are intensely aware of this commitment to living, planning and achieving together. Your common commitment is also a common responsibility: the Church is entrusted to your hands, and much is expected of you.

4. We are emerging from the painful experience of the catacombs. It is natural that our first efforts to recover should be influenced by the needs of the moment and therefore may show a certain lack of coordination. Today, however, we must overcome this first phase of reorganization and work to create a pastoral plan for your Church, priorities and the means and times for their implementation.

5. It will take into account the primary requirement of catechesis and theological formation in line with your Eastern ecclesial tradition. I know that high quality educational institutions are already working to this end. The proclamation of the Gospel must be the basis of every ecclesial project: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!", the Apostle reminds us.

6. In this plan we must not forget the active role of lay people who have received a good spiritual and cultural formation and share the responsibility for the Church.

7. Religious will have a particularly important task: monasticism first of all, which gives the Church the ever vital sense and strength of her roots and finds in prayer the certainty of the "one thing necessary". I hope that it will grow and be structured in accordance with the glorious traditions of the Christian East. Religious communities dedicated to the apostolate are also called to play a fundamental role in this pastoral plan, striving to proclaim the Word of God and to guarantee a loving presence which will also serve as a means of evangelization among those whose hearts and souls have been marked by atheism: by encountering the transparent, loving acts and the strong but gentle words of brothers and sisters who radically live their baptismal commitment, they will be touched by grace, while the eyes of their hearts will learn to see what is invisible yet very real: the mystery of God's love at work in history. In post-communist society, God's love must permeate the theological and catechetical study and pastoral commitment of the faithful. You Bishops will be the first witnesses of this. I am sure that the Latin religious institutes will not fail to cooperate in the work of evangelization and in charitable activity. Only in this way can a unanimous and credible witness be given to that happy complementarity which the Lord has instilled in his Church.

8. In your pastoral plan for the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine, priority must be given to that spirit of peace and Christian brotherhood which would distinguish every believer in Jesus Christ. As was the common heritage of 10 centuries and the inspiration of your Bishops who wanted the union with Rome, you are called to experience a burst of growth and generosity that will also be at the service of your Orthodox brothers and sisters, so that the full communion which Jesus Christ desires will be restored; with their Pastors you will seek new ways of bearing common witness and will avoid sterile contradictions, well aware that the Father calls us all to charity, so that the world may believe. This is the spirit that will guide your steps and indicate new, unknown ways for the leaven of charity and for mutual readiness to help

your people's growth.

I fervently hope that the Lord will soon allow me to visit you on Ukrainian soil, in order to proclaim with all Christians our common desire to find in Christ the answer to human anxieties and the one true light that never sets. I await that day as a true spiritual gift.

As I wait to be able to do so in person, please convey the Pope's tender and concerned Blessing to your faithful.

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