



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MEMBERS OF THE "ASSEMBLY OF ORGANIZATIONS
FOR AID TO THE EASTERN CHURCHES" (ROACO)***

Clementine Hall

Friday, 24 June 2011

*Your Eminence,
Your Beatitude,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Members and Friends of ROACO,*

I would like to express my most cordial welcome to each one of you and I gladly reciprocate with my very best wishes the courteous tribute addressed to me by Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches and President of the Assembly of Organizations for Aid to the Eastern Churches, accompanied by the Archbishop Secretary, by the Undersecretary and by the ecclesiastical and lay collaborators of the Dicastery.

I address a brotherly greeting to the new Maronite Patriarch, H.B. Béchara Boutros Raï, and I also extend my thoughts to the other prelates, to the representatives of the international agencies and of the University of Bethlehem, as well as to the benefactors gathered here. I thank you all for your generous cooperation in the mandate of universal charity which the Lord Jesus never ceases to entrust to the Bishop of Rome as Successor of the Blessed Apostle Peter.

Yesterday we celebrated the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord. The Eucharistic Procession, which I led from the Lateran Cathedral to the Basilica of St Mary Major, is always an appeal to the beloved City of Rome and to the entire Catholic community to continue to walk on the difficult paths of history, among the great forms of poverty in the world, both spiritual and material, so as to offer the love of Christ and of the Church, which flows from the paschal mystery, a mystery of love, of the total self-giving that brings forth life.

Love “never ends” (1 Cor 13:8), the Apostle Paul says, and is capable of changing hearts and the world with God’s power, sowing and reawakening solidarity, communion and peace everywhere. These gifts are entrusted to our frail hands, but their development is certain because God’s power works precisely through weakness, if we are able to open ourselves to his action, if we are true disciples who seek to be faithful to him (cf. 2 Cor 12:10).

Dear friends of ROACO, never forget the Eucharistic dimension of your purpose in order to keep pace constantly with ecclesial charity. The charity of the Church wishes to reach out in a particular way to the Holy Land but also to the whole of the Middle East, to sustain the Christian presence there. I ask you to do your utmost — including involving the public authorities with whom you are in touch at an international level — to enable the pastors and faithful of Christ, in the East where they were born, to be able to live there not as “strangers and sojourners” but as “fellow citizens” (Eph 2:19) who bear witness to Jesus Christ as did the saints of the past, also children of the Eastern Churches, before them.

The East is rightly their homeland on earth. It is there that still today they are called to foster the common good, through their faith, making no distinctions. Every person who professes this faith must be recognized as having equal dignity and true freedom, thereby permitting a more fruitful ecumenical and interreligious collaboration.

I thank you for your reflections on the changes that are taking place in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East, which are a source of anxiety throughout the world. Through the communications received at this time from the Coptic-Catholic Cardinal-Patriarch and from the Maronite Patriarch, as well as the Pontifical Representative in Jerusalem and the Franciscan Custos of the Holy Land, the Congregation and the agencies will be able to assess the situation on the ground for the Church and the peoples of that region, which is so important for world peace and stability.

The Pope wishes to express his closeness, also through you, to those who are suffering and to those who are trying desperately to escape, thereby increasing the flow of migration that often remains without hope. I pray that the necessary emergency assistance will be forthcoming, but above all I pray that every possible form of mediation will be explored, so that violence may cease and social harmony and peaceful coexistence may everywhere be restored, with respect for the rights of individuals as well as communities. Fervent prayer and reflection will help us at the same time to read the signs emerging from the present season of toil and tears: may the Lord of history always turn them to the common good.

The Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops, celebrated last October in the Vatican and in which several of you took part, brought the brothers and sisters of the East even more decisively into the heart of the Church and introduced us to perceiving the signs of newness in our time. However, immediately after that meeting, *senseless violence* ferociously attacked

defenceless people (cf. [Angelus, 1 November 2010](#)) in the Syrian-Catholic Cathedral of Baghdad, and in subsequent months in various other places. The suffering experienced because of Christ can help to sow the good seed of the Synod and produce an evermore fruitful harvest, God willing. I therefore present to the good will of ROACO members all that resulted from the Synod and, also, the precious spiritual heritage constituted by the cup of the passion of many Christians, as a reference for an intelligent and generous service which begins with the lowliest, which excludes no one and always measures its authenticity against the Eucharistic Mystery.

Dear friends, under the guidance of their generous Pastors and with your indispensable support, the Eastern Catholic Churches will always be able to strengthen communion with the Apostolic See, jealously guarded down the centuries, and to make an original contribution to the new evangelization, both in the homeland and in the growing diaspora.

I commend these hopes to the protection of the Most Holy Mother of God and of St John the Baptist, Precursor of Christ, on the liturgical Solemnity of his birth.

The Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul is also approaching. On that day I shall give thanks to the Good Shepherd, as Cardinal Sandri recalled, for the 60th anniversary of my Ordination to the priesthood. I am deeply grateful for the prayers and good wishes you have offered me as a pleasing gift. I ask you to share in my entreaty to the “*Lord of the harvest*” (Mt 9:38) that he grant the Church and the world numerous, fervent Gospel workers. And, as a pledge of my affection, I gladly impart to each one of you, to your loved ones and to all the communities entrusted to you, the comfort of the Apostolic Blessing.