



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO HIS BEATITUDE RAPHAËL BIDAWID
PATRIARCH OF BABYLON OF THE CHALDEANS
AND THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF IRAQ**

*To His Beatitude
Raphaël Bidawid
Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans
and the Catholic Bishops of Iraq*

So then, my brothers and dear friends, do not give way but remain faithful in the Lord. I miss you very much, dear friends; you are my joy and my crown" (*Phil. 4, 1*).

With these words of the Apostle Paul, I convey to you, Bishops and faithful of the Catholic Church in Iraq, my loving greetings in the Lord. The visit that Cardinal Achille Silvestrini, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, is making to you on my behalf gives me the opportunity to send you these words of encouragement. It is my prayerful hope that his mission will bear the desired positive results. He will assure you of my affection, the affection of a father who cannot forget his children who are in anguish. Indeed, this father considers you his chosen ones, ever present in his heart and in his prayers.

I express my heartfelt thanks also to the Apostolic Nuncio for the truly evangelical work of faith and courage that he has accomplished in your midst. I am grateful to him for giving voice and form to my personal concern, and for the dedication with which he continues to strive for the good of the Church.

With all of you, Bishops, priests, Religious and laity of the Catholic Eastern Rite Churches and of the Latin Church, I exchange the holy kiss of peace in the Lord, conscious of the special commitment that the current circumstances demand of you all. The Pastors in a special way are called to be self-giving, like the Good Shepherd. You are called to do all you can so that the sheep

entrusted to you, especially the poor and neglected, may find a source of consolation and hope in the love of God and of the Church.

The entire Church, close to you who are in need, is grateful to you and proud of you for the faith with which you are witnessing to Christ's name.

Your land preserves Christian memories of immense value, which you share with your brothers and sisters who are members of other Churches. These testify to an ancient flourishing Christianity that was generous in its apostolic zeal, famous for the depth of its doctrine and missionary commitment to distant countries. Again today your faithful who are migrating to live elsewhere are edifying other Christians by their fidelity to prayer, to meditation on the Sacred Scriptures, to the Liturgy, and through the witness of their lives.

I share with you the desire that they might remain in this land of yours in order to perpetuate the inheritance of their forefathers, nourished by their traditions and supported by their priests. Together let us entrust this intention to God's goodness, hoping that improved conditions, of benefit in the first place to Iraq, will enable them to stay and to continue to be recognized as hard-working and honest citizens, as well as sons and daughters of the glorious Church of Saint Ephrem. In this way they would be spared both the trauma of being uprooted and the threat of losing their identity. For your good and the good of other followers of Christ, the Church will make every effort towards this end.

Today more than ever you are called to seek unity in order to bear clear witness to Jesus Christ in facing present difficulties. Through you I address a fraternal greeting in the Lord to the Heads of the Christian Churches not yet in full communion with us. I assure them of a constant remembrance in my prayers to our common Father.

I am aware of the difficult conditions in which the citizens of Iraq have to live: for them I have raised my voice many times and in many ways, so that their suffering may come to an end. The affectionate concern of all Christians, and of so many people of good will, goes in particular to the children and the elderly who are obliged to endure many deprivations. The weak and the innocent should not have to pay for offences of which they are not responsible.

I pray that Iraq may soon be enabled to re-establish fruitful reciprocal relations with other peoples, in a spirit of reconciliation and peace, in the framework of international solidarity and respect for the common good. I express the desire that your country may once more flourish in peace, and that hope may be restored to all God's children. I address this hope to the members of all religions.

Upon all of you, Bishops, priests, deacons, men and women Religious, and families of the Catholic Church, and upon the entire Iraqi people without distinction, I earnestly invoke God's consoling blessings.

From the Vatican, 28 April 1993.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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