



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE MELKITE GREEK CATHOLICS

Monday, 12 February 2001

Your Beatitude,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. The arms of the Successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome, open joyfully to welcome the Patriarch of the Melkite Greek Catholics, who has come to celebrate our full ecclesial communion. With this gesture, I spiritually embrace the Bishops, priests, religious and faithful of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church present here, as well as all her members who today proclaim their fidelity to Christ by their commitment and often at the cost of great difficulty.

There is no symbol more profound than the liturgical action we have just concluded: celebrating the fullness of ecclesial communion by sharing the Body and Blood of the Lord. In them the Church's unity shines out, as well as her faith, hope and love. In them, we have a foretaste of the deep joy we ask of the Lord: that of the day when all Christians will be reunited, drawing from the one Bread and the one Cup the strength to bear a unanimous witness of evangelization.

2. Union with the See of Rome in no way diminishes your own characteristics or treasures; on the contrary, it strengthens them and makes them a precious gift that enriches the whole Catholic world. The Pope appreciates your attachment and fidelity to the traditions of the Christian East, of which you are rightly proud; he hopes that they will always be jealously guarded and fully rediscovered, in order to be accessible to the men and women of our day and thus to nourish their Christian life. You are a strong, consistent Church rooted in your identity: take care to continue your pastoral commitment, developing your ancient treasures and giving suitable answers to the questions of our contemporaries. Your efforts to be fully integrated into the milieu where your faithful live shows that Christianity can accept everything good found in cultures and, at the same

time, fruitfully enrich them.

Your ecumenical commitment is especially appreciated. I urge you to find sacramental strength and theological incentive in the Divine Liturgy, to participate more and more actively in the search for unity, with prudent courage and in union with the whole Catholic Church, so that the time of full communion will come quickly.

3. Your Beatitude, I offer my fraternal wishes that the Spirit will make fruitful the distinguished task to which you are called, and that you may be a model for the people entrusted to you: after the example of the Good Shepherd, care with the same love for all the sheep of your flock, building them up by your priestly prayer, by the ardent love of a "*pater et caput*" who has received the mission to guide them and by the spirit of universality that comes from belonging to the Catholic Church: this will help you to view your decisions and choices in the broader horizon of the good of the Church and of humanity. In the troubled context of the Middle East, be an ardent defender of the weak and a tireless peacemaker. Always keep a special place in your heart for your children in the diaspora so that, knowing their Pastor loves them, they will always feel a part of their Mother Church, while being fraternally united with the other local Catholic communities and their Pastors. Go out to them all, not with human power and wealth, but only with the unarmed love of Christ, who, though he was rich, became poor to enrich all people.

4. Your Beatitude, please convey my particularly grateful greetings to your venerable predecessor, Patriarch Maximos V. We are indebted to his pastoral zeal for many achievements that have contributed to the progress of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church. Assure him of the affectionate gratitude of the Pope, who prays for him and asks God to grant him an abundance of his consolations.

In returning to your see, be assured that the Successor of Peter accompanies you with his prayer. May the warmth of the holy kiss we have exchanged support you in the efforts and joy of your pastoral endeavours!

With these sentiments I cordially give you all my Apostolic Blessing.