



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE LATIN AND GREEK-CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF ROMANIA
ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT TO ROME**

Saturday, 1 March 2003

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. Your *ad limina* visit gives me the pleasant occasion to converse with you, strengthening the bonds of communion that already exist between the Pastors of the beloved dioceses of Romania and the Successor of Peter. It is likewise a favourable occasion to reflect together on the pastoral activities and prospects of the Catholic community in your country.

I greet each of you fraternally. In particular I want to thank Archbishop Ioan Robu, President of the Bishops' Conference of Romania, for his kind words on your behalf. Welcome, dear and venerable Pastors of a noble country that, in its long history, has lived very difficult periods without ever succumbing.

Today's meeting evokes the deep emotion I experienced when, in May 1999, Providence led me to your homeland. Those were unforgettable days during which I could experience the Romanian people's deep affection for the Pope.

The Catholic Church in Romania, with its two rites, represents a very active minority in the spiritual and social fields. I know that your communities work side by side with the country's Orthodox majority, collaborating, wherever possible, in a spirit of fraternal dialogue and reciprocal respect. I am sure that this attitude, inspired by mutual trust, will enable you to overcome the difficulties that still exist. In this regard, the work of the Joint Commission for the Dialogue between the Greek-Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church of Romania will be vital. Its task is to find appropriate solutions to the questions that arise from time to time.

Priority of family life, formation of young people, dialogue and cooperation with the Orthodox

2. A particularly important area for your action today is the pastoral care of the family. I know that on this theme there have also been effective meetings even with your Orthodox brethren for a common discernment of the problems that the family is going through even in your country. One can say that in the vast majority of cases your families have stayed faithful to sound Christian traditions. However, it is essential to consider the danger that can arise in contemporary society.

The fragility of couples, the ongoing emigration of young families to Western countries, the handing over of the education of the children to their grandparents, the forced separation of spouses, especially when it is the mother who leaves in search of work, the widespread practice of abortion, birth control practiced with methods that are opposed to respect for the dignity of the human person, these are just some of the burning issues that you are concerned about and have to deal with in pastoral life. We can never emphasize enough the primacy of the family in the overall work of educating the new generations.

Can we ever forget, dear and venerable Pastors, that the crisis of the Christian vision of life is the sorry aftermath of the Communist dictatorship? It must be recognized how enormous is the mission of the Church. For this reason, it is necessary to promote dialogue and collaboration among those who have received the saving proclamation of Christ from the successors of the Apostles. In harmony with your brethren of the Romanian Orthodox Church and realizing your common responsibility before the Founder of the Church, it is necessary to develop formation centres where young people can learn their common gospel heritage, in order to bear witness to it in a decisive way in society.

3. I pray God to inspire in today's faithful the courage to follow Christ with the determination that was shown by the heroic witness of Romanian Catholics of both rites who bore unspeakable suffering under the Communist regime, never faltering in their fidelity to the Gospel. At this moment I think of the beloved Cardinal Alexandru Todea whom the Lord called to himself last year. And how can we forget the many martyrs of your communities - including seven Bishops, whose cause of canonization is under way - who watered your land with their blood?

Church of Romania, despite the problems that still exist, do not be afraid! God blesses your efforts, as one can see from the large number of candidates for the priesthood in the seminaries. Thus what Tertullian wrote of the early Church, "*The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians*" is once again proven true.

If it is true that the Romanian people in their inner conscience could resist militant atheistic materialism and keep intact the Christian proclamation, it is now necessary to make emerge from the hearts of the faithful this interior treasure encouraging each one to bear a coherent Gospel witness. Only in this way, will it be possible to oppose the dangerous advance of a materialistic vision of life.

4. The process of the integration of Romania into the broader context of the European Union and of the institutions of the continent is moving forward. This is certainly a positive event, despite the risk of certain ambiguities. Indeed, the impact on your fellow-citizens of a vision in some way conditioned by consumerism and selfish individualism may entail the danger that they may not know how to distinguish between the values and defects of Western society and may end by forgetting the Christian riches of their own tradition.

By becoming a part of the European structures, the Romanian people will do well to remember that they do not only have something to receive, but also that they have a rich spiritual, cultural and historical heritage to give for the benefit of the unity and vitality of the entire continent. Forged by harsh past and recent trials, your communities must know how to keep firm their fidelity to the 1,000-year-old patrimony of Christian values they received from their fathers in which they have been shaped.

This mission is also a call to rally the laity in their apostolic responsibilities. It will be necessary to form them properly so that they may know how to make their contribution to shaping society by a courageous Christian witness.

5. Truly demanding tasks lie before you! The urgent matters that emerge are such as to make you feel even more strongly the need to recover full unity among all disciples of Christ. It will be necessary to work with every possible means to hasten this goal. This is exactly what His Beatitude Teoctist, the Orthodox Patriarch of Romania, repeated during his extraordinary visit to Rome last October. On that occasion, it became clearer that the common witness of Christians is essential in order to communicate the Gospel more effectively to the contemporary world. This is the pressing vocation of all Christians, in docile obedience to the command of Christ who asks us to pray and work "that they may all be one" (Jn 17,21).

I pray the Lord that the blessed day will soon come in which Catholics and Orthodox can communicate at the same sacred table. In this regard a special mission has been entrusted to the venerable Greek-Catholic Church of Romania, by virtue of her deep familiarity with the Eastern tradition. It is necessary that the minds and hearts of all be turned with increasing confidence to the Lord to implore his help in this initial phase of the new millennium. There is certainly no lack of difficulties and we must reckon with heavy sacrifices. But the stakes are so high that they merit a generous effort on the part of all.

6. Venerable brothers, your country has had the providential opportunity to see flourishing side by side for centuries the two traditions, the Latin and the Byzantine, that beautify the face of the one Church. You work in something like a spiritual "laboratory", where the riches of undivided Christianity can demonstrate their full force and vitality.

Among you Pastors there must reign constant esteem and reciprocal fraternal consideration. In

problems of common concern may you be able to help one another, for a better mutual knowledge of the spiritual heritage of each other. I think, for example, of teaching in the seminaries, of improving their facilities and of exchanging lecturers, especially to help the seminaries that suffer from a shortage of teachers. Likewise, I can think of the care of the linguistic minorities in your dioceses, of the help that your Churches can give to other communities that are short of clergy, and of your valuable contribution in terms of missionary commitment.

Similarly, the constant and cordial collaboration of consecrated men and women in the life of the Church is more necessary than ever. Of course, you must respect their legitimate autonomy, but at the same time it is right to invite these valuable apostolic energies to collaborate in the pastoral toils of you Pastors, and of the clergy who help you.

May you watch over all things with a fatherly spirit, avoiding making imprudent decisions, especially in the area of accepting priestly and religious vocations, and of their eventual pastoral destination.

7. Venerable and dear Brothers! These are a few thoughts that occurred spontaneously to me after meeting you individually and hearing about the fervent ecclesial life that motivates you - Pastors, clergy, consecrated persons and laity - to be able to respond more faithfully to Christ's call. I encourage you to continue in this direction and I hope that your work will always be sustained by God's consolations. To this end I invoke the motherly protection of Mary on your land called "the Garden of the Mother of God".

Finally, while I ask you to convey to your faithful my affectionate greeting and the assurance of my constant prayer to the Lord, I impart to you and to those entrusted to your pastoral care a special Apostolic Blessing.