



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 6 December 2006*

### ***Apostolic Journey to Turkey***

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

At this General Audience, with what is now the custom after every Apostolic Journey, I would like to retrace the various stages of the Pilgrimage I made in Turkey from Tuesday to Friday last week. As you know, many aspects of this Visit were not easy, but God accompanied it from the outset and so it was a success.

Therefore, just as I asked you to prepare for it and accompany it with your prayers, I now ask you to join me in thanking the Lord for the way it went and for its conclusion.

I entrust to him the fruits that I hope it will yield, both as regards relations with our Orthodox brethren and our dialogue with the Muslims.

I feel it is my duty, first of all, to renew the cordial expression of my gratitude to the President of the Republic, to the Prime Minister and to the other Authorities, who welcomed me so courteously and assured me of the necessary conditions for everything to take place in the best possible way.

I then offer my brotherly thanks to the Bishops of the Catholic Church in Turkey, with their collaborators, for all that they did. I extend my special thanks to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, who received me at his home, to the Armenian Patriarch Mesrob II, to the Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan Mor Filüksinos and to the other Religious Authorities.

I felt spiritually supported throughout the Visit by my venerable Predecessors, the Servants of God Paul VI and John Paul II, both of whom made a memorable Visit to Turkey, and especially by Bl. John XXIII, who was Papal Representative in that noble Country from 1935 to 1944 and left there memories full of affection and devotion.

With reference to the vision of the Church that the Second Vatican Council presented (cf. Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 14-16), I would say that the Pope's Pastoral Journeys help him to carry out his mission that unfolds "in concentric circles". In the innermost circle, the Successor of Peter strengthens Catholics in the faith; in the intermediate circle he meets other Christians; and in the outer one he addresses non-Christians and the whole of humanity.

The first day of my Visit to Turkey was spent within the area of this third "circle", the widest one; I met the Prime Minister, the President of the Republic and the President for Religious Affairs, to whom I addressed my first Speech; I paid homage at his Mausoleum to the "Father of the Homeland", Mustafa Kemal Atatürk; I then had the opportunity to speak to the Diplomatic Corps at the Apostolic Nunciature in Ankara.

This intense sequence of meetings formed an important part of my Visit, especially given that Turkey is a Country with a vast Muslim majority, even if it is governed by a Constitution that asserts the secularity of the State.

It is therefore a Country emblematic of the great challenge at stake today across the globe: on the one hand, we must rediscover the reality of God and the public importance of religious faith; and on the other, we must ensure that people can freely express this faith, that it is not debased by forms of fundamentalism and that they are able to firmly reject every form of violence.

I thus had a favourable opportunity to renew my sentiments of esteem for the Muslims and for the Islamic civilizations. At the same time, I was able to insist on the importance of Christians and Muslims working together for humankind, for life and for peace and justice, reasserting that the distinction between the civil and religious spheres is a value and that the State must assure citizens and religious communities effective freedom of worship.

In the area of interreligious dialogue, divine Providence granted me, almost at the end of my Journey, an unscheduled Visit which proved rather important: my Visit to Istanbul's famous Blue Mosque. Pausing for a few minutes of recollection in that place of prayer, I addressed the one Lord of Heaven and earth, the Merciful Father of all humanity. May all believers recognize that they are his creatures and witness to true brotherhood!

The second day took me to Ephesus, and I therefore quickly found myself in the innermost "circle" of the Journey, in direct contact with the Catholic Community. In fact, the Shrine of Mary's House stands in a pleasant place called the "Hill of the Nightingale" which overlooks the Aegean Sea.

This is a small and ancient chapel, built to contain a cottage which, according to a very old tradition, the Apostle John had built for the Virgin Mary after taking her with him to Ephesus.

It was Jesus himself who entrusted them to each other before he died on the Cross, when he said to Mary, "Woman, behold, your son!" and to John, "Behold, your mother!" (Jn 19: 26-27). Archaeological research has shown that from time immemorial the site has been a place of Marian worship which is also dear to Muslims, who go there regularly to venerate the One they call "*Meryem Ana*", Mother Mary.

In the garden in front of the Shrine, I celebrated [Holy Mass](#) for a group of the faithful who came from the neighbouring city of Izmir, from other parts of Turkey and from abroad. At "Mary's House" we truly felt "at home", and in that atmosphere of peace we prayed for peace in the Holy Land and throughout the world. There, I remembered Fr Andrea Santoro, a Roman priest who witnessed to the Gospel with his blood on Turkish soil.

The intermediate "circle", that of ecumenical relations, occupied the central part of this Visit and took place on the Feast of St Andrew, 30 November. This event provided an ideal context for the consolidation of fraternal relations between the Bishop of Rome, Successor of Peter, and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, a Church which Tradition claims was founded by the Apostle St Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

In the footsteps of Paul VI, who met Patriarch Athenagoras, and John Paul II, who was welcomed by Dimitrios I, Successor of Athenagoras, I renewed this gesture of great symbolic value with His Holiness Bartholomew I, to confirm our reciprocal commitment to persevere on the way towards the re-establishment of full communion between Catholics and Orthodox.

To sanction this firm resolution, I signed a [Common Declaration](#) with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, which constitutes a further milestone on our journey. It was particularly significant that this act took place at the end of the [solemn Liturgy for the Feast of St Andrew](#) in which I took part; it ended with the double Blessing imparted by the Bishop of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Successors respectively of the Apostles Peter and Andrew. In this way, we showed that at the root of every ecumenical endeavour there is always prayer and the persevering invocation of the Holy Spirit.

Likewise in this context, [I had the joy of visiting His Beatitude Mesrob II, Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church](#), and of meeting the Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan. In this context, I am also glad to mention my conversation with the Grand Rabbi of Turkey.

My Visit ended, just before departing for Rome, with my return to the innermost "circle", in other words, my meeting with the Catholic Community, all of whose members were present in the Latin Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Istanbul.

The Ecumenical Patriarch, the Armenian Patriarch, the Syrian-Orthodox Metropolitan and Representatives of the Protestant Churches were also taking part in this [Holy Mass](#).

In short, all Christians, in the diversity of their traditions, rites and languages, were gathered together in prayer. Comforted by the words of Christ, who promised believers "rivers of living water" (Jn 7: 38), and by the image of the many members united in one body (cf. I Cor 12: 12-13), we lived the experience of a renewed Pentecost.

Dear brothers and sisters, I returned here to the Vatican, my heart brimming with gratitude to God and sentiments of sincere affection and esteem for the inhabitants of the beloved Turkish Nation, by which I felt welcomed and understood. The appreciation and warmth that surrounded me, despite the inevitable difficulties that my Visit created for the normal functioning of their daily activities, live on as a vivid memory that inspires me to pray. May the Almighty and Merciful God help the Turkish People, their Government Leaders and the Representatives of the different religions to build together a future of peace, so that Turkey may be a "bridge" of friendship and fraternal collaboration between West and East.

Let us also pray that through the intercession of Mary Most Holy, the Holy Spirit will make this Apostolic Visit fruitful, and throughout the world enliven the mission of the Church, established by Christ to proclaim the Gospel of truth, peace and love to all Peoples.

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### To special groups

I welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims here today, including the student groups from America, Australia and Denmark. May your Advent visit to Rome be a time of renewed hope and joy. Upon all of you, I invoke God's abundant Blessings!

Lastly I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*.

In these days, the Season of Advent, which has just begun, presents us with a shining example of the Immaculate Virgin. May she encourage you, dear *young people*, on your journey of attachment to Christ. For you, dear *sick people*, may Mary be your support for renewed hope, and for you, dear *newly-weds*, may she be your guide in building your family. My Blessing to you all.

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