



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE EXTRAORDINARY SYNOD
OF THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH FOR SYRIAN CATHOLICS***

Saturday, 28 April 2007

*Your Beatitude,
Venerable Brothers,*

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor 1: 3). I welcome you and greet you all at the end of your meeting with these words that the Apostle to the Gentiles addressed to the Christians of the community of Corinth.

Concern for all the Churches, complying with the mandate which Christ entrusted to the Apostle Peter and to his Successors, has impelled me to convoke your Extraordinary Synod, at which Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State, whom I greet and cordially thank, presided in my name. I would also like to thank you, Your Beatitude, and each one of you for your active participation in the Synod's work and for your generous contributions to solving the problems and difficulties that the praiseworthy Syrian Catholic Church has been encountering for some time.

In convoking you to this extraordinary assembly, my sole intention was to revive and increasingly revitalize the age-old bonds that unite your Church to the Apostolic See, and at the same time, to express the esteem and anxiety which the Bishop of Rome feels for each one of you, Pastors of a portion of the People of God which, although not large, is ancient and important.

My greeting also goes to your collaborators, to the priests and deacons in the first place, as well as to all the members of the Syrian Catholic Church.

The liturgy of the Easter Season in which we are living invites us to turn our gaze and heart to the fundamental event of Christian faith: Christ's death and Resurrection.

The Acts of the Apostles that we are reading in these days presents to us the progress of the newborn Church, a journey that was not always easy but rich in apostolic fruit. From the first, there had been no lack of external hostility and persecution, nor, even within the communities, was the risk of tension and opposition absent.

In spite of these shadows and the various difficulties that the early Christians had to confront, the radiant light of the Church's faith in Jesus Christ never grew dim.

From her very first steps, the Church, guided by the Apostles and their collaborators and enlivened by an extraordinary courage and inner force, was able to preserve and to increase the precious treasure of unity and communion over and above differences in people, language and culture.

Venerable Brothers, while the Extraordinary Synod in which you have taken part is drawing to a close, aware of the problems that have worried you all these years and that you are seeking to overcome, I remember with gratitude my Venerable Predecessor, Pope John Paul II, who was close to you in so many ways. He listened to you, he met with you, and he tirelessly urged you on several occasions, especially in his Letter of August 2003, to seek unity and reconciliation with the participation of all.

As for me, I took up the task on which he had embarked in my Letter of October 2005, since I am deeply convinced that today, as at the dawn of Christianity, each community is asked to offer a clear witness of brotherhood.

It is moving to read in the Acts of the Apostles that "the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul" (4: 32). It is here, in this shared love which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, that the secret of apostolic effectiveness lies.

In these days, dear and venerable Brothers, you have reflected on ways to overcome the obstacles that prevent your ecclesial life from functioning normally. You are well aware of what is necessary and even indispensable.

It is the ministry that the Lord entrusted to you with his flock that demands it; it is the good of the Syrian Catholic Church that demands it. The particular situation in which the Middle East is living and the witness that the Catholic Churches in their unity can give, demand it.

May Paul's exhortation to the faithful of Corinth, tinged with sorrow, resonate in your hearts: "I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Cor 1: 10).

In our time Christian communities across the world must face so many challenges, while

numerous dangers and traps risk masking the Gospel values.

With regard to your Church, the violence and conflicts which mark a part of the flock entrusted to your care constitute extra difficulties that endanger even more not only peaceful coexistence, but also peoples' very lives.

In such situations it is important that the Syrian-Catholic Ecclesial Community be able to proclaim the Gospel forcefully, to promote a pastoral ministry adapted to the challenges of post-modernity and to a fragmented, divided world, a shining example of unity.

Venerable Brothers, the Second Vatican Council emphasized that the Oriental Catholic Churches, in response to Christ's prayer *ut unum sint*, are called to play a special role in the promotion of the ecumenical process: "by prayer above all, by their example, by their scrupulous fidelity to the ancient traditions of the East, by better knowledge of each other, by working together, and by a brotherly attitude towards persons and things (Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 24).

Here is a final element that, together with those requirements dictated by interreligious dialogue, can only spur you to exercise the apostolic mission the Lord has entrusted to your Church with confidence. Precisely yesterday, the Latin liturgy granted us to hear the moving episode of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. You too are called today to continue the Apostle Paul's missionary action with enthusiasm, confidence and perseverance, following in the footsteps of St Ignatius of Antioch, St Ephrem and your other Patron Saints.

May Mary, whom you venerate under the title of Our Lady of Deliverance, always intercede for you and protect you.

With these sentiments, I assure you of my full support and that of my collaborators, and I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you who are present here, the Patriarch and the members of your Holy Synod, and to all the faithful of the Syrian Catholic rite.