



The Holy See

PAPAL MASS FOR THE CLOSING
OF THE SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE MIDDLE EAST
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica
Sunday, 24 October 2010

[\(Video\)](#)

[Photo Gallery](#)

*Venerable Brothers,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear brothers and sisters,*

Two weeks from [the opening Celebration](#), we are gathered once again on the Lord's day, at the Altar of the Confession in St Peter's Basilica, to conclude the [Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops](#). In our hearts is a deep gratitude towards God who has afforded us this truly extraordinary experience, not just for us, but for the good of the Church, for the People of God who live in the lands between the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia. As Bishop of Rome, I would like to express my gratitude to you, Venerable Synod Fathers: Cardinals, Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops. I wish to especially thank the Secretary General, the four Presidents Delegate, the Relator General, the Special Secretary and all the collaborators, who have worked tirelessly in these days. This morning we left the Synod Hall and came to "the temple to pray": in this, we are touched directly by the parable of the pharisee and the publican, told by Jesus and recounted by the Evangelist St Luke (cf. 18:9-14). We too may be tempted, like the pharisee, to tell God of our merits, perhaps thinking of our work during these days. However, to rise up to Heaven, prayer must emanate from a poor, humble heart. And therefore we too, at the conclusion of this ecclesial event, wish to first and foremost give thanks to God, not for our merits, but for the gift that He has given us. We recognize ourselves as small and in need of salvation, of mercy; we

recognize all that comes from Him and that only with his Grace we may realize what the Holy Spirit told us. Only in this manner may we “return home” truly enriched, made more just and more able to walk in the path of the Lord.

The First Reading and the responsorial Psalm stress the theme of prayer, emphasizing that it is much more powerful to God's heart when those who pray are in a condition of need and are afflicted. “The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds” affirms Ecclesiasticus (35:21); and the Psalmist adds: “Yahweh is near to the broken-hearted, he helps those whose spirit is crushed” (34:18). Our thoughts go to our numerous brothers and sisters who live in the region of the Middle East and who find themselves in trying situations, at times very burdensome, both for the material poverty and for the discouragement, the state of tension and at times of fear. Today the Word of God also offers us a light of consoling hope, there where He presents prayer, personified, that “until he has eliminated the hordes of the arrogant and broken the sceptres of the wicked, until he has repaid all people as their deeds deserve and human actions as their intentions merit” (Ecc 35:21-22). This link too, between prayer and justice makes us think of many situations in the world, particularly in the Middle East. The cry of the poor and oppressed finds an immediate echo in God, who desires to intervene to open up a way out, to restore a future of freedom, a horizon of hope.

This faith in God who is near, who frees his friends, is what the Apostle Paul witnesses to in today's epistle, in the Second Letter to Timothy. Realizing that the end of his earthly life was near, Paul makes an assessment: “I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7). For each one of us, dear brothers in the episcopacy, this is a model to imitate: may Divine Goodness allow us to make a similar judgment of ourselves! St Paul continues, “the Lord stood by me and gave me power, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed for all the gentiles to hear” (2 Tim 4:17). It is a word which resounds with particular strength on this Sunday in which we celebrate World Mission Day! Communion with Jesus crucified and risen, witness of his love. The Apostle's experience is a model for every Christian, especially for us Shepherds. We have shared a powerful moment of ecclesial communion. We now leave each other so that each may return to his own mission, but we know that we remain united, we remain in his love.

The Synodal Assembly which concludes today has always kept in mind the icon of the first Christian community, described in the Acts of the Apostles: “The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul” (Acts 4:32). It is a reality that we experienced in these past days, in which we have shared the joys and the pains, the concerns and the hopes of Christians in the Middle East. We experienced the unity of the Church in the variety of Churches present in that region. Led by the Holy Spirit, we became “united, heart and soul” in faith, in hope, and in charity, most of all during the Eucharistic celebrations, source and summit of ecclesial communion, and in the Liturgy of the Hours as well, celebrated every morning according to one of the seven Catholic rites of the Middle East. We have thus enhanced the liturgical, spiritual and theological wealth of the

Eastern Catholic Churches, as well as of the Latin Church. It involved an exchange of precious gifts, from which all the Synodal Fathers benefited. It is hoped that this positive experience repeats itself in the respective communities of the Middle East, encouraging the participation of the faithful in liturgical celebrations of other Catholic rites, thus opening themselves to the dimensions of the Universal Church.

Common prayer helped us to face the challenges of the Catholic Church in the Middle East as well. One of these is communion within each *sui iuris* Church, as well as in the relationships between the various Catholic Churches of different traditions. As today's Gospel reminded us (cf. Lk 18:9-14), we need humility, in order to recognize our limitations, our errors and omissions, in order to be able to truly be "united, heart and soul". A fuller communion within the Catholic Church favours ecumenical dialogue with other Churches and ecclesial communities as well. The Catholic Church reiterated in this Synodal meeting its deep conviction to pursuing such dialogue as well, so that the prayer of the Lord Jesus might be completely fulfilled: "May they all be one" (Jn 17:21).

The words of the Lord Jesus may be applied to Christians in the Middle East: "There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:32). Indeed, even if they are few, they are bearers of the Good News of the love of God for man, love which revealed itself in the Holy Land in the person of Jesus Christ. This Word of salvation, strengthened with the grace of the Sacraments, resounds with particular potency in the places in which, by Divine Providence, it was written, and it is the only Word which is able to break that vicious circle of vengeance, hate, and violence. From a purified heart, in peace with God and neighbour, may intentions and initiatives for peace at local, national, and international levels be born. In these actions, to whose accomplishment the whole international community is called, Christians as full-fledged citizens can and must do their part with the spirit of the Beatitudes, becoming builders of peace and apostles of reconciliation to the benefit of all society.

Conflicts, wars, violence and terrorism have gone on for too long in the Middle East. Peace, which is a gift of God, is also the result of the efforts of men of goodwill, of the national and international institutions, in particular of the states most involved in the search for a solution to conflicts. We must never resign ourselves to the absence of peace. Peace is possible. Peace is urgent. Peace is the indispensable condition for a life worthy of humanity and society. Peace is also the best remedy to avoid emigration from the Middle East. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" we are told in the Psalm (122:6). We pray for peace in the Holy Land. We pray for peace in the Middle East, undertaking to try to ensure that this gift of God to men of goodwill should spread through the whole world.

Another contribution that Christians can bring to society is the promotion of an authentic freedom of religion and conscience, one of the fundamental human rights that each state should always respect. In numerous countries of the Middle East there exists freedom of belief, while the space given to the freedom to practice religion is often quite limited. Increasing this space of freedom

becomes essential to guarantee to all the members of the various religious communities the true freedom to live and profess their faith. This topic could become the subject of dialogue between Christians and Muslims, a dialogue whose urgency and usefulness was reiterated by the Synodal Fathers.

During the work of the Synod what was often underlined was the need to offer the Gospel anew to people who do not know it very well or who have even moved away from the Church. What was often evoked was the need for a new evangelization for the Middle East as well. This was quite a widespread theme, especially in the countries where Christianity has ancient roots. The recent creation of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization also responds to this profound need. For this reason, after having consulted the episcopacy of the whole world and after having listened to the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, I have decided to dedicate the next Ordinary General Assembly, in 2012, to the following theme: “*Nova evangelizatio ad christianam fidem tradendam* — The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith”.

Dear brothers and sisters of the Middle East! May the experience of these days assure you that you are never alone, that you are always accompanied by the Holy See and the whole Church, which, having been born in Jerusalem, spread through the Middle East and then the rest of the world. We entrust the results of the Special Assembly for the Middle East, as well as the preparation for the Ordinary General Assembly, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Queen of Peace. Amen.