



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH FOR SYRIANS**

Saturday, 19 December 1998

Your Beatitude,

1. The Bishop of Rome receives you with immense joy for the first time since your election and enthronement as the Patriarch of Antioch for Syrians. With the holy kiss of peace we are exchanging today, Rome, the city which the holy Apostles Peter and Paul glorified by their martyrdom, opens her arms to welcome you and the Church over which you preside, and to recognize the special place of honour to which our common fidelity to the apostolic heritage entitles you.

It was in Antioch that the Lord's disciples were called Christians for the first time. It was from Antioch that blessed Peter came to Rome. Through you, I venerate the wealth of faith that belongs to your glorious see. I thank you, Your Beatitude, for this act of communion and affection which you have made a priority of your new ministry as Patriarch.

2. I wanted full communion no longer to be expressed by conferral of the pallium, but in a way better suited to acknowledging the dignity of the patriarchal office. Indeed, the Eucharist by its nature is the symbol that best expresses full communion, of which it is also the inexhaustible source. For this reason, in the solemn Eucharistic sacrifice celebrated last Wednesday at the Basilica of St Mary Major, Your Beatitude offered the holy Body and live-giving Blood of our Lord to Cardinal Achille Silvestrini, whom I had appointed Legate for this occasion, and the latter also offered the Holy Gifts to Your Beatitude. This action, which will remain engraved in the memory of the faithful, will now be repeated on the first visit of the new Patriarchs of the Eastern Churches in full communion with the See of Rome.

3. The Successor of Peter's concern for your Church, in addition to being a pledge of concrete support, is expressed in a prayerful petition that she will be radiant though her Gospel witness in the very difficult conditions of life experienced by a good number of her children. Today I once again hope that she will cultivate the liturgy, which closely links her to the very origins of Christianity, that she will seek in the Fathers and Doctors solid nourishment for her faith and find in the courage of the martyrs and the asceticism of the monks a strong encouragement to devote herself only to what is necessary.

You share this patrimony with the Syro- Malankara Catholic Church, which is actively working for the evangelization of India. Certain parts of this heritage are common to the Maronite Church. The bond of a common tradition is particularly close with the Syrian Orthodox Church. I am very pleased to learn that the ecumenical path is being pursued and that there are concrete prospects of collaboration, starting with the liturgical field.

4. I hope that your Church's future commitment will be made with full respect for her own tradition, as well as with efforts towards an ever greater understanding and participation of today's believers.

I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to all the Bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated persons and all the faithful, especially those who are suffering in body and spirit, and to all who are tried in these difficult days, as I ask Your Beatitude to bring them the assurance of the Pope's affection when you meet them. Your Beatitude, I offer you a new kiss of peace and hope that you will be an icon of Christ, Head and Shepherd, for the Church entrusted to your care.

© Copyright 1998 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana