



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF GREECE  
ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT**

*Friday, 5 February 1999*

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,*

*Dear Ordinary for Greek Catholics of the Armenian rite!*

1. It is a joy for me to welcome you today on the occasion of your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. This is the first meaning of the *ad limina* visit: it is meant to shed light on the communion of Peter's Successor with the local Churches spread throughout the world. I thank Archbishop Nikolaos Fóscolos, President of your Episcopal Conference, for the sentiments of affectionate devotion he has expressed to me and for his words on your behalf.

As Pastors responsible for leading God's People, you are called to help communities be guided by the Holy Spirit in their duty of bearing witness to the Gospel, while at the same time contributing to peace and harmony among men. First of all I would like to tell you how much I appreciate the ministry you carry out with such great care. In your country, where the faithful of the Catholic Church are a minority, it is a good idea for you to continue organizing your Episcopal Conference for the success of those pastoral projects you desire. Thus you will respond more effectively to the many demands of your mission and at the same time ensure a more effective administration. From this standpoint it would seem appropriate to create a permanent secretariat, so that the decisions taken at your assemblies may be more promptly acted upon, and those pastoral projects which concern the whole Catholic Church in Greece may become a reality. Thus you will be able to support one another and respond effectively to the various needs of the episcopal ministry with the help of capable people. To this end, it would be good to organize regular occasions for dialogue and reflection among all the elements of the Catholic community. These meetings, following your recent Assembly, will facilitate ecclesial gatherings or diocesan synods aimed at giving pastoral ministry a new impetus which will involve the whole Catholic community in your Dioceses.

Through you I would like to give my cordial encouragement to all who work with you in your mission, especially the priests who bear the weight of daily ministry and, because they are so few, are faced with an increasing and ever more exhausting number of problems and tasks. Through fraternal meetings with them, you can support them in their mission, help them evaluate pastoral activities and develop new projects. I also greet with affection the faithful of your Dioceses, whose task is essential, since by virtue of Baptism they have a part in building up the Church and in giving a Christian spirit to temporal realities. Tell young people of the Church's call to open their hearts to Christ and invite them to participate next year in the activities planned for World Youth Day, when they will be able to meet many of their contemporaries.

2. The Catholic Church in Greece has just held a second Assembly, in which representatives of the secular clergy, men and women religious and lay people gathered round you to give new fervour to pastoral life. This is an important step in your apostolic journey and is intended to involve all the faithful in a more active participation in the Church's life. They are all called to grow in union with the Saviour through personal prayer, meditation on Sacred Scripture, lectio divina, liturgical and sacramental life and a filial Marian devotion. These are necessary elements for the human and spiritual growth and maturation of Christians.

To guide every individual on the path of intimacy with Christ, an intense formation is indispensable. It should not be reduced to an initial phase in Christian life, but develop into an ongoing process to support the Christian in his daily relations with Christ and in his missionary commitment. I therefore encourage everyone to continue on this path of spiritual and intellectual renewal, in order to build a community of faith dedicated generously to proclaiming and bearing witness to the Gospel.

I would like to draw attention to the particular role of the liturgy in the life of the Christian community. It is there that each person discovers the depths of the divine mystery and experiences the Church as the Body of Christ. In this regard, the task of translating the various liturgical books requires special attention on the part of the Latin Bishops in order to respond to the needs of our times. Based on the principles given in the *Consilium's* Instruction of 25 January 1969, this project must respect Latin traditions and the related liturgical patrimony dear to the hearts of the faithful, who can thus approach Christ more easily by encountering him in the sacraments and in the splendour of divine worship.

3. The Catholic community has spread throughout Greece and its members come from various backgrounds. Moreover, the summer months see a great number of tourists, to whom you wish to offer spiritual support. This human reality complicates any pastoral efforts to make the faithful a community of one heart and soul (cf. Acts 4:32). Much has already been done in this regard in the areas of evangelization, catechesis, education, and charitable and social aid. Some of the faithful, with God's help, are particularly involved in social work, serving the poor, promoting sharing and solidarity, responding to the needs of the sick and devoting themselves to the very important task

of education and family support.

This participation in social life, which today I wish strongly to encourage, is a way of faithfully following Jesus. It is an outstanding way of witnessing, in which the Church is recognized as an open community prepared to undertake and pursue activities that bring her close to every person, while respecting their legitimate freedoms. Active collaboration in the social field with members of other religious confessions is an important aspect of ecumenical dialogue, since a common activity creates mutual respect and love.

In this perspective, Catholic schools make an essential contribution to social life. I would like to offer my greetings and encouragement to the many priests, men and women religious and lay people who dedicate themselves to educating youth. Indeed, the acceptance of children - whatever their religious confession - mutual discovery and esteem are elements that will help young Greeks live together, while respecting their differences; these are a treasure, as long as they are put at the service of all. Through an integral formation, young people will receive an education based on fundamental moral, human and civil values, with beneficial effects on all society.

4. The particular situation of the Catholic Church in Greece also urges her constantly to heed the Lord's call to advance ever further on the path of unity (cf. Jn 17:21), in response to the ecumenical commitment of the Second Vatican Council. "Among the most fervent petitions which the Church makes to the Lord during this important time as the eve of the new millennium approaches, is that unity among all Christians of different denominations will increase until they reach full communion. I pray that the Jubilee will be a promising opportunity for fruitful collaboration in the many areas which unite us; these are unquestionably more numerous than those which divide us" (Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 16). In this spirit, with full respect for the programmes of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities and for the legitimate right to religious freedom, it is necessary to look positively and hopefully at ecumenical dialogue, constantly seeking to be instruments of the Holy Spirit, so that full unity will be achieved in the ways God desires.

In view of the Great Jubilee now close at hand, Christ's love spurs us to engage in ecumenical projects that will enable Christ's disciples to have a better knowledge of their own traditions and those of others. Clearly, these activities can be a witness to the world of the love that comes from the Saviour and of the firm will of all Christians to achieve full unity as soon as possible. Every joint initiative and prayer, every respectful dialogue, every request for mutual forgiveness, can bring brothers and sisters closer in faith and enable people today to discover the Father's tenderness and mercy, the central theme of the final year of preparation for the Great Jubilee. As the Apostle says, love comes from God and "if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 Jn 4:11). I would again like to stress the value of prayer in ecumenical relations; this helps us to live as brothers and sisters: "Taking part together in prayer accustoms us once more to living side by

side and helps us in accepting and putting into practice the Lord's will for his Church" (Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, n. 53).

5. In your quinquennial reports, you underscored the shortage of priests for serving Christian communities, at the same time expressing your trust in the Lord who never abandons his flock. It is true, the pastoral care of vocations must be one of your main concerns and, indeed, a commitment of the entire Christian community. In this respect, I urge families always to be fully conscious of their responsibility for the birth and development of priestly and religious vocations. Parents should not fear for the future, should one of their children show a desire to commit himself to the Lord! It is their role to help him fully achieve his vocation. Those who dedicate themselves to following Christ without reserve are given the necessary means to fulfil the mission entrusted to them.

Men and women religious have an irreplaceable role in the Catholic Church of your country. I urge them generously to persevere in their work even in difficult pastoral situations, in close communion with their Pastors and in fidelity to their own charism. I invite religious congregations and other institutes to send new members to Greece to strengthen existing communities or to create new ones, which can perceive the Catholic Church's needs in that land and the contribution that active and contemplative religious life is called to make to it. In this regard, I greet the contemplative orders in your country with grateful affection. They are a bright beacon, a beautiful witness of faith and love for God, and are regarded with esteem and consideration by Christians of other denominations.

6. It would also be good to develop new plans for the pastoral care of vocations, for the discernment and formation of candidates to the priesthood, perhaps even within a common structure serving all the Dioceses. The young people of the different Dioceses would thus have the opportunity to live in a healthier educational community and to create important ties for the future of priestly fraternity in the country. Furthermore, other contemporaries of theirs would be attracted by a joyful experience, which strengthens the desire to give one's life to God and to others.

Priests and religious also have an important role in the development of a young person's vocation. They must be eager to show in their personal lives and in their daily ministry the happiness they experience in following Christ. It is important that young people find adults who are models of Christian life and can convey a sense of God, openly inviting them to total consecration in the priesthood or the religious life.

7. You mentioned the problems families must face, both from without, as a couple and in relations between generations, as well as the tensions to which mixed marriages are subjected, especially regarding the religious education of their children. Through suitable family ministry, the Church has the duty to remind the faithful of the indissolubility of marriage and of the need to live their own married life in harmony with the faith. Nor should you fail to help couples experiencing moments of

crisis, so that they can rediscover the enthusiasm of their initial commitment, increase their spiritual life and draw from the grace of the sacrament of Matrimony the necessary energy to carry out their mission as spouses and parents. In a secularized and materialistic world, it is important to hold up to today's men and women a Christian ideal that will serve as the basis for their life and daily commitment.

8. If the Catholic Church cares for her faithful, the latter in turn wish to make their responsible contribution to social life by serving the common good. It is for Catholics, then, and for all the country's inhabitants to work tirelessly in promoting peaceful harmony among all Greeks, with each one enjoying the same rights and freedoms, particularly religious freedom. In this regard, I am delighted with the significant efforts being made by various leaders and with the good will shown by all in seeking just and equitable solutions to problems so far unresolved, specifically those concerning the Catholic Church's legal status. I also hope that dialogue will continue and be intensified with the various competent authorities for the good of the people as a whole. This will enable the Catholic community to experience a renewed vitality and help everyone to participate more and more actively in building a common home by instilling trust in all citizens as they construct a peaceful and fraternal society.

9. At the end of your *ad limina* visit, I hope that you will return to your country strengthened in your mission as successors of the Apostles. May the communion you have experienced with your fellow Bishops in the past few days help you to intensify your collaboration, so that your Dioceses will feel they are sisters and persevere, at the national level, with the cooperation necessary to face the challenges of their mission and, within the framework of the greater Europe, will continue their relations with the various ecclesial institutions! I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all the faithful of your Dioceses.