



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO KAREKIN I, CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS

Thursday, 25 March 1999

"Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!" (Ps 103:1).

Yes, I bless the Lord who has given us this moment of grace, this fraternal meeting. It is a great joy to be able to welcome you during these days, Your Holiness, together with His Beatitude Torkom Manoogian and all the distinguished persons who have accompanied you.

I am delighted by the impressive exhibition of Armenian culture and history on display in the Vatican Museums. In them we can admire a heritage permeated by the Christian faith! Because of their fidelity to their roots and tenacity in adversity, the Armenian people could turn their many sufferings into a source of creativity and dynamism. According to tradition, the Armenian Church received the faith from the Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew. But it is because of the missionary activity of St Gregory the Illuminator that the Gospel spread among the Armenian people at the very beginning of the fourth century. Since those ancient times, the Christian faith has never ceased to enlighten and inspire the Armenian people, in their deep convictions and in their daily life.

Christians will shortly be celebrating the great mystery of Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection. "But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him" (Rom 6:8-9). We will sing and celebrate the mystery of our redemption. Our faith in Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of our life, of our mission and of the bonds of fraternal communion between our Churches. I acknowledge with satisfaction the progress achieved in our common search for unity in Christ, the Word of God made flesh; it is the fruit of our ecumenical relations and theological dialogue. The unfortunate divisions of the past should no longer continue to exert a negative influence on the life and witness of our Churches. The Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and the 17th centenary of the foundation of the Armenian Church are a pressing invitation to bear a common witness to our faith in Jesus Christ.

The Catholic and Armenian Churches have developed deep relations, especially since the Second

Vatican Council. Positive meetings have taken place since that memorable day in 1971 when Catholicos Vasken I and Pope Paul VI embraced in a gesture full of brotherly friendship. I would also like to thank Your Holiness in particular for what you have done and are still doing to achieve Christian unity. In this spirit that motivates us, it is to be hoped that wherever Catholic and Armenian faithful live side by side they will further these fraternal acts through sustained initiatives in the different areas of service to humanity. May we not neglect the slightest occasion to deepen and broaden our positive collaboration in this one mission which Christ has entrusted to us!

Your Holiness, I am delighted by your invitation to come to Armenia, which has also been extended to me by the President of the Republic, and I thank you for letting me know of your wish to receive me as a guest at your Patriarchate of Echmiadzin, to reinforce our ties and to strengthen unity among Christians. I pray the Lord that he will enable me to make this visit. As I thank you for making the journey to Rome, a highly symbolic expression of Christian brotherhood, I wish you good health, so that you may long continue to serve your Church. I ask the Holy Spirit to help us always to be servants of men and walk on the path of unity to which Christ invites us. I pray the Lord to bless the Armenian Church, its Pastors and its faithful. I ask the Virgin Mary, whose name contains all the mysteries of salvation, as St Gregory the Illuminator said, to guide your communities with her motherly tenderness. May the Lord reveal his face to you and keep you in peace!