



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO EASTERN CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF EUROPE

Saturday, 14 September 2019

[Multimedia]

*Your Eminences,
Your Beatitude,
Dear Brother Bishops,*

I thank Cardinal Bagnasco for his greeting on your behalf. I am happy to welcome you at the end of your annual gathering, which takes place this year in Rome. Your meeting, organized under the aegis of the Episcopal Conferences of Europe, is a sign of the rich ritual variety of the Catholic Church on this continent, which is not limited to the Latin tradition. Among you, I see many who represent the different Churches of the Byzantine tradition and many from beloved Ukraine. Present, too, are representatives from the Middle East, India and other regions, who have found a welcome in European countries. As the [Second Vatican Council](#) observed, “variety within the Church in no way harms its unity; rather it manifests it” (*[Orientalium Ecclesiarum](#)*, 2). In fact, Christian unity is not uniformity. Uniformity is the destruction of unity; Christian truth is not monotonous, but “symphonic”; otherwise it would not come from the Holy Spirit.

A few months ago, during my [Apostolic Journey to Romania](#), I celebrated the [beatification of seven bishop-martyrs of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church](#). It was an occasion that demonstrated how much the entire Catholic Church and the Successor of Peter are grateful for the witness of fidelity to communion with the Bishop of Rome offered again and again throughout history, at times even to the shedding of blood. This fidelity is a precious gem in your treasury of faith, a distinctive and indelible sign. One of the Romanian martyrs reminds us of this. To those who demanded that he abjure his Catholic communion, he said, “My faith is my life”. Catholic communion is part of your particular identity, yet it in no way detracts from that identity. On the contrary, it contributes to its full realization, for example, by protecting it from the temptation of

closing in on itself and falling into national or ethnic particularisms that exclude others. And this is a danger of the present time in our civilization: particularisms that become populisms and seek to dictate and make everything uniform.

It is precisely the intercession of the saints and holy martyrs, who experience the perfect communion of heaven, that impels us to undertake a constant path of purification of ecclesial memory and to aspire to ever greater unity with all who believe in Christ. That “they may all be one” (*Jn 17:21*): this is the ardent desire that amid his passion Jesus bore in his heart, pierced for all on the Cross. Both the [Second Vatican Council](#) and the [Code of Canon Law for the Eastern Churches](#) remind us that you are entrusted with a specific mission on the journey of ecumenism. In these days, you have reflected on the meaning of your ecumenical mission in the present time.

Today, while all too many inequalities and divisions threaten peace, we feel called to be artisans of dialogue, promoters of reconciliation and patient builders of a civilization of encounter that can preserve our times from the incivility of conflict. While so many people allow themselves to be caught up in a spiral of violence, in a vicious circle of demands and constant mutual recriminations, the Lord wants us to be meek sowers of the Gospel of love. In the Christian family, you are the ones who, looking to “the God of all comfort” (*2 Cor 1:3*), are committed to healing the wounds of the past, overcoming prejudices and divisions, and offering hope to all as you walk side by side with your non-Catholic brothers and sisters. I have had the grace of sharing some powerful moments with them. I think of the [prayer for peace in the Holy Land in the Vatican Gardens](#); the [meeting with refugees on the island of Lesbos](#); the dialogue for peace [in the Middle East held in Bari](#), preceded by common prayer under the protection of Saint Nicholas and of the Holy Mother of God “who shows the way”. I feel that the way shown to us from on high is made up of prayer, humility and love, not of regional or even traditionalist claims; no. The way is prayer, humility and love. By walking together, by doing something together for others and for our common home, let us rediscover, at the heart of our catholicity, the ancient significance attributed to the Roman See, called to “preside over the whole assembly in charity” (Saint Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans*, Prologue), and to the Bishop of Rome as *servant of the servants of God*.

Living your ecclesial traditions to the full leads you to draw from the same springs of spirituality, liturgy and theology as the Orthodox Churches. It is beautiful to be witnesses together of such great riches! In the academic world, too, it is possible to promote common programmes of study and cultural exchange, involving young priests in particular, so that they can be trained to have an open mind. Most of all, and in everything, let us help each other to live in love with all. Love knows no canonical or jurisdictional boundaries. It pains me to see, even among Catholics, squabbles about jurisdictions. Please... As the Apostle Paul, who gave his life in this City reminds us, love always has primacy and will never end (cf. *1 Cor 13*). When we bend over a suffering brother or sister; when we become neighbours to those who endure loneliness and poverty; when we put at the centre the marginalized – children who will not see the light of day, young people deprived of hope, families tested by being broken, or sick or elderly persons who are cast aside – we are

already walking together in the love that heals divisions.

In this way, we prepare to dwell in the one heaven to which we have been called. There the Lord will not seek an account of which or how many territories remained under our jurisdiction. He will not ask how we contributed to the development of our national identities. Instead, he will ask how much we loved our neighbour, every neighbour, and how well we were able to proclaim the Gospel of salvation to those we met along the road of life. So let us ask for the grace to desire this. For only in loving do we find joy and spread hope. It is by loving that we give second place to those secondary realities to which we are still attached – to money too, which is poisonous: the devil comes in through our pockets; don't forget! – and give pride of place to the only things that remain forever: God and our neighbour.

Have courage, dear brothers; go forward in the spirit of communion! I assure you of a constant remembrance in my prayers. You have a place in my heart, and I ask you, please, to pray for me because I need it. Thank you!