



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PATRIARCH
OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

8 May 1999

*Your Beatitude,
Venerable Metropolitans and Bishops
of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Romania,
Mr President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,*

1. I often thought of a Gospel scene as I was preparing for this much desired meeting: that of the Apostle Andrew, your first evangelizer, who comes full of enthusiasm to his brother Peter to tell him the tremendous news: “*We have found the Messiah (which means Christ)*” (Jn 1:41). This discovery changed the lives of both brothers: leaving their nets, they became “fishers of men” (Mt 4:19) and, after having been inwardly transformed by the Spirit of Pentecost, they set out on the paths of the world to bring everyone the news of salvation. With them, other disciples continued the Gospel work they had undertaken, inviting the nations to salvation and “*baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” (Mt 28:19).

Your Beatitude, venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, we are the children of this evangelization. We too have received this message; we too have been redeemed in Christ. If we are meeting today, it is through the loving plan of the Most Holy Trinity, who, on the eve of the Great Jubilee, has granted us, the successors of these Apostles, to commemorate their meeting. The Church has grown and spread throughout the world; the Gospel has enriched cultures. Here in Romania too, the treasures of holiness, of Christian fidelity, sometimes purchased with one's life, have embellished this spiritual temple which is the Church. Today we thank God for this together.

2. The deep feeling prompted by Your Beatitude's visit to the city of Sts Peter and Paul, the Coryphaei of the Apostles, is still vivid in my mind. I have a touching memory of this meeting which took place in difficult times for your Church. It is now my turn, as a pilgrim of love, to pay homage to this land steeped in the blood of ancient and recent martyrs, who *"have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"* (Rv 7:14). I come to meet a people who welcomed the Gospel, assimilated it, defended it against repeated attacks and now considers it an integral part of their cultural heritage.

It is a culture inherited from ancient Rome, which has been patiently built up in a tradition of holiness beginning in the countless cells of monks and nuns who devoted their time to singing God's praises and, like Moses, to holding up their arms in prayer so that the peaceful battle of faith might be won for the benefit of the peoples of this land. The Gospel message thus reached the worktable of intellectuals, many of whom contributed through their charism to fostering its assimilation by the new generations of Romanians, starting out to build their future.

Your Beatitude, I have come here as a pilgrim to express the whole Catholic Church's affectionate closeness to you in the efforts of the Bishops, clergy and faithful of the Romanian Orthodox Church as one millennium ends and another emerges on the horizon. I am close to you and support you with esteem and admiration in the programme of ecclesial renewal which the Holy Synod has undertaken in such essential areas as theological and catechetical formation, to make the Christian soul, which is one with your history, flourish anew. In this work of renewal blessed by God, know, Your Beatitude, that Catholics are at the side of their Orthodox brethren in prayer and in their willingness to help in any useful way. The one Gospel is waiting to be proclaimed by everyone together, in love and in mutual esteem. How many fields are opening before us in a task which involves us all, with mutual respect and in the shared desire to be useful to mankind for whom the Son of God gave his life! Common witness is a powerful means of evangelization. Division, on the other hand, shows the victory of darkness over light.

3. Your Beatitude, both of us in our personal histories have seen chains and experienced the oppression of an ideology that wanted to eradicate faith in Christ the Lord from the souls of our people. But the gates of hell did not prevail against the Church, Bride of the Lamb. It is he, the Lamb, sacrificed and glorious, who sustained us in distress and who now allows us to sing the song of regained freedom. It is he whom one of your contemporary theologians called "the restorer of man", the one who heals the sick and raises them up after their long subjection to the heavy burden of slavery. After so many years of violence and the repression of freedom, the Church can pour the balm of grace on man's wounds and heal him in Christ's name, saying, as Peter said to the man lame from birth: *"I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk"* (Acts 3:6). The Church does not tire of urging and imploring the men and women of our time to stand up, to set out again towards the Father, to be reconciled with God. This is the first act of charity humanity expects of us: the proclamation of the Gospel and rebirth in the sacraments, which are then prolonged in serving our brothers and sisters.

Your Beatitude, I have come to contemplate the Face of Christ etched in your Church; I have come to venerate this suffering Face, the pledge to you of new hope. Your Church, aware of having “found the Messiah”, is trying to lead her children and all who are seeking God with a sincere heart to meet him; she does so by solemnly celebrating the Divine Liturgy and by her daily pastoral work. This commitment accords with your tradition, so rich in figures who were able to combine a deep life in Christ with generous service to the needy; an impassioned commitment to study, with tireless pastoral concern. Here I will mention just one: the holy monk and Bishop Callinicus of Cernica, so close to the heart of the faithful of Bucharest.

4. Your Beatitude, dear Brother Bishops, our meeting is taking place on the day when the Byzantine liturgy celebrates the feast of the holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian. Who better than he, who was intensely loved by the Master, can communicate to us this living experience of love? This is what seems in his letters to be the synthesis of his life, the word which, in old age, when what is superfluous disappears, stayed with him to mark his personal experience: *“God is Love”*. This is what he contemplated as he lay his head on Jesus' heart and raised his eyes to his pierced side, from which flowed the water of Baptism and the Blood of the Eucharist. This experience of God's love not only invites us, but I would say gently obliges us to love, the true and only synthesis of the Christian faith.

“Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13:4-7). These are the words of the Apostle Paul to a community tormented by conflicts and tensions; these words are valid for all times. We know well that today these words are addressed first of all to us. They do not serve to reproach the other for his error but to unmask our own, the error of each one of us. We have known conflict, recrimination, inner reticence and closure to one another. Yet, we are both witnesses that despite these divisions, at the moment of great trial when our Churches seemed shaken to their very foundations, here too, in this land of Romania, the martyrs and confessors knew how to glorify God's name with one heart and one soul. It is precisely by reflecting on the marvellous work of the Spirit, incomprehensible to human logic, that our weakness finds its strength and our hearts gain new courage and confidence amid the difficulties of the present situation.

5. I am pleased that, in practical terms, it has been possible to begin a fraternal dialogue here in Romania on the problems which still divide us. The Greek-Catholic Church of Romania suffered violent repression in recent decades, and her rights were scorned and violated. Her children suffered greatly, some even bearing the supreme witness of bloodshed. The end of persecution brought freedom, but the problem of ecclesial structures still awaits a definitive solution. May dialogue be the way to heal the wounds that are still open and to resolve the difficulties which still exist! The victory of love will not only be an example for the Churches but for all society. I pray God, the Father of mercies and source of peace, that love, accepted and given, will be the sign by

which Christians are recognized as faithful to their Lord.

The Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church have come a long way on the road to reconciliation: I would like to offer God my deep and heartfelt gratitude for all that has been achieved, and I want to thank you, venerable Brothers in Christ, for the efforts you have made on this path. Has the time not come to resume theological research with determination, supported by prayer and by the sympathy of all the Orthodox and Catholic faithful?

God knows how much our world and also our Europe, which we hoped had been freed from fratricidal conflicts, need a witness of fraternal love which overcomes hatred and quarreling and opens hearts to reconciliation! Where are our Churches when dialogue falls silent and weapons roar their language of death? How can we teach our faithful the logic of the Beatitudes, so different from the reasoning of the powerful of this world?

Your Beatitude, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, let us restore visible unity to the Church or this world will be deprived of a witness that only the disciples of God's Son, who died and rose out of love, can offer it so that it may be prompted to open itself to faith (cf. *Jn 17:2*). And what can encourage the people of today to believe in him, if we continue to tear the seamless garment of the Church, if we do not succeed in receiving the miracle of unity from God by working to remove the obstacles which prevent its full manifestation? Who will forgive us for this lack of witness? I have sought unity with all my strength, and I will continue to do all I can until the end to make it one of the priority concerns of the Churches and of those who govern them in the apostolic ministry.

6. Your land is strewn with monasteries. From St Nicodemus of Tismana, buried in the mountains and forests, beats the heart of ceaseless prayer, of the invocation of the holy name of Jesus. Thanks to Paissy Velitchkovsky and his disciples, Moldavia has become the centre of a monastic renewal which spread to neighbouring countries at the end of the 18th century and later. Monastic life, which has always been present even during the time of persecution, has produced and still produces individuals of great spiritual stature, around whom many promising vocations have blossomed in recent years.

The convents, the churches covered with frescoes, the icons, liturgical ornaments and manuscripts are not only the jewels of your culture but are also a moving testimony of Christian faith, of a lived Christian faith. This artistic heritage, born of the prayer of monks and nuns, of artisans and peasants inspired by the beauty of the Byzantine liturgy, is a particularly significant contribution to the dialogue between East and West, as well as to the rebirth of brotherhood which the Holy Spirit is enkindling in us on the threshold of the new millennium. Your land of Romania, between *Latinitas* and Byzantium, can become the land of encounter and communion. It is crossed by the majestic Danube, which bathes the regions of the East and West: may Romania, like this river, know how to build relations of understanding and communion between different

peoples, thus helping to strengthen the civilization of love in Europe and the world!

7. Your Beatitude, dear Fathers of the Holy Synod, not many days lie between us and the beginning of the third millennium of the Christian era. People have their eyes fixed on us in expectation. They strain their ears to hear from us, from our life more than from our words, the ancient announcement: "We have found the Messiah". They want to see whether we too are capable of leaving the nets of our pride and our fears to *"announce a year of favour from the Lord"*.

We will cross this threshold with our martyrs, with all who have given their lives for the faith: Orthodox, Catholics, Anglicans, Protestants. The blood of martyrs has always been a seed which gives birth to new Christian faithful. But to do this, we must die to ourselves; we must bury the old man in the waters of rebirth and rise as new creatures. We cannot disregard Christ's call and disappoint the world's expectations, nor fail to join our voices so that the eternal word of Christ may ring out ever more clearly for the new generations.

Thank you for wanting to be the first Orthodox Church to invite the Pope of Rome to her country; thank you for giving me the joy of this fraternal meeting; thank you for the gift of this pilgrimage, which has allowed me to strengthen my faith through contact with the faith of fervent brothers and sisters in Christ!

"Come, let us walk together in the light of the Lord!". To him be glory for ever and ever! Amen.

Thank you. An unforgettable visit, Romania. Here we have crossed the threshold of hope. Thank you. God bless us all.