

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE SYNOD OF THE ARMENIAN CATHOLIC PATRIARCHAL
CHURCH**

Thursday, 9 April 2015

Your Beatitudes, Your Excellencies,

I greet you fraternally and I thank you for this meeting which is taking place shortly before this coming Sunday's celebration in the Vatican Basilica. We shall raise prayers of Christian suffrage for the sons and daughters of your beloved people, who were victims about 100 years ago. We shall invoke Divine Mercy to help us all, in love through truth and justice, to heal every wound and to hasten concrete gestures of reconciliation and peace among the Nations who are still unable to reach a reasonable consensus on the interpretation of these sad events.

In you and through you I greet the priests, men and women religious, seminarians and the faithful laity of the Armenian Catholic Church: I know that very many have accompanied you here to Rome in these days, and that many more will be spiritually united with us, from the countries in the Diaspora, such as the United States, Latin America, Europe, Russia, Ukraine, and the Mother Land. I think with sadness particularly of those zones, such as that of Aleppo — "the martyr city" as the Bishop told me — which 100 years ago were a safe haven for the few survivors. These regions, in this last period, have witnessed Christians, not only Armenians, in permanent danger.

Your people, whom tradition recognizes as the first to convert to Christianity in 301, has a 2000-year-old history and safeguards an admirable legacy of spirituality and culture, besides the capacity to rise again after the many persecutions and trials to which it has been subjected.

I invite you to always cultivate feelings of gratitude to the Lord, for having been able to remain faithful to Him even in the most difficult periods. It is also important to ask God for the gift of wisdom of heart: the commemoration of the victims of 100 years ago indeed sets before us the darkness of the *mysterium iniquitatis*. One can only understand it with this attitude.

As the Gospel says, from it the depths of man's heart the darkest forces can burst out, capable of systematically planning the annihilation of his brother, of considering him an enemy, an adversary, or even an individual devoid of human dignity itself. However, for believers the question of evil done by man introduces the mystery of participating in the redeeming Passion: many sons and daughters of the Armenian nation were able to pronounce the name of Christ at the point of pouring out their blood, or to face starvation in their interminable forced exodus.

The agonizing pages of your people's history continue, in a certain sense, the Passion of Jesus, but the seed of his Resurrection is planted in each one of them. May you Pastors never fail in your commitment to teach the lay faithful how to read reality with new eyes, in order to be able to say every day: my people is not only one that suffers for Christ, but above all one that is risen in Him. For this reason it is important to remember the past, but to draw from it new sap

to nourish the present with the joyous message of the Gospel and with the witness of charity. I encourage you to support the permanent formation process of priests and consecrated people. They are your primary collaborators: communion between you and them will be strengthened by the exemplary fraternity that they perceive within the Synod and with the Patriarch.

Our grateful thoughts go at this time to those who are working to alleviate in some measure the tragedy your ancestors suffered. I think especially of Pope Benedict XV who intervened through Sultan Mehmed V to put an end to the massacre of Armenians. This Pontiff was a great friend of the Christian East: he instituted the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and the Pontifical Oriental Institute, and in 1920, he enrolled St Ephrem the Syrian among the Doctors of the universal Church.

I am happy that our meeting should be taking place on the vigil of the analogous act that I shall have the joy of performing on Sunday for the great figure of St Gregory of Narek.

To his intercession I especially entrust the ecumenical dialogue between the Armenian Catholic Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church, mindful of the fact that 100 years ago like today, martyrdom and persecution had already brought about the "ecumenism of blood". Upon you and upon your faithful I now invoke the Lord's blessing, while I ask you not to forget to pray for me! Thank you!