

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 7 May 2008*

**Greeting to His Holiness Catholicos Karekin II,
Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians**

It is my great joy today to greet His Holiness Catholicos Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, and the distinguished delegation accompanying him. Your Holiness, I pray that the light of the Holy Spirit will illumine your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, the important meetings you will have here, and particularly our personal conversations. I ask all who are present today to pray for God's blessing upon this visit.

Your Holiness, I thank you for your personal commitment to the growing friendship between the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Catholic Church. In 2000, soon after your election, you came to Rome to meet Pope John Paul II, and a year later, you graciously received him in Holy Etchmiadzin. You came once again to Rome together with many Church leaders from East and West, for the funeral liturgy of Pope John Paul II. I am sure that this spirit of friendship will be further deepened during the coming days.

In an external niche of Saint Peter's Basilica, there is a fine statue of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, founder of the Armenian Church. It serves to remind us of the severe persecutions suffered by Armenian Christians, especially during the last century. Armenia's many martyrs are a sign of the power of the Holy Spirit working in times of darkness, and a pledge of hope for Christians everywhere.

Your Holiness, dear Bishops and dear friends, together with you I implore Almighty God, through the intercession of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, to help us grow in unity, in one holy bond of Christian faith, hope and love.

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Pentecost

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As you see we have with us this morning His Holiness Catholicos Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, and a distinguished delegation. I renew the expression of my joy at the possibility of welcoming him which has been granted to me this morning. His presence today rekindles our hope for the full unity of all Christians. I gladly take this opportunity also to thank him for the friendly welcome he recently offered my Cardinal Secretary of State in Armenia. It is likewise a pleasure for me to recall the Catholicos'

unforgettable visit to Rome in 2000, just after his election. On meeting him, my beloved Predecessor John Paul II gave him a famous relic of St Gregory the Illuminator and later went to Armenia to reciprocate his visit.

The efforts made by the Armenian Apostolic Church for ecumenical dialogue are well known, and I am sure that this visit of the venerable Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians will help to intensify the relations of fraternal friendship that bind our Churches. These days of immediate preparation for the Solemnity of Pentecost encourage us to rekindle our hope in the Holy Spirit's help so that we may advance on the path of ecumenism. We are certain that the Lord Jesus will never abandon us in our quest for unity, since his Spirit is tirelessly at work to sustain our efforts in striving to overcome every division and mend every tear in the living fabric of the Church.

It was precisely this that Jesus promised his disciples in the last days of his earthly mission, as we have just heard in the Gospel passage: he assured them of the help of the Holy Spirit that he would send to continue to make them aware of his presence (cf. Jn 14: 16-17). This promise became reality when, after the Resurrection, Jesus entered the Upper Room, greeted the disciples with the words, "Peace be with you", and breathing on them said: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20: 22). He authorized them to forgive sins. Here, therefore, the Holy Spirit, appears as a power for the forgiveness of sins, for renewing our hearts and our lives; and thus he renews the earth and creates unity where there was division. Furthermore, on the Feast of Pentecost the Holy Spirit showed himself in other signs: in the sign of a mighty wind, tongues of fire, and the Apostles' ability to speak all languages. This was a sign that the Babylonian dispersion, the result of pride that separates men and women, had been overcome in the Spirit who is love and gives unity in diversity. Since the very first moment of her existence the Church has spoken in all languages - thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit and the tongues of fire - and has lived in all cultures, she does not destroy any of the various gifts, of the different charisms, but draws all of them together in a great, new unity that reconciles: unity and multiformity.

The Holy Spirit, who is eternal charity, the bond of unity in the Trinity, with his power of divine charity unites scattered humanity thereby creating the vast multiform community of the Church throughout the world. In the days following the Ascension of the Lord until Pentecost Sunday, the disciples, with Mary, were gathered in the Upper Room to pray. They knew that they themselves could not create or organize the Church: the Church had to be born and organized by divine initiative; she is not created by us, she is a gift of God. And this is likewise the only way in which she creates unity, a unity that must grow. The Church in every time - and particularly in these nine days between the Ascension and Pentecost - is spiritually united in the Upper Room with the Apostles and Mary to ceaselessly implore the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Driven onwards by his mighty wind she will thus be able to proclaim the Gospel to the very ends of the earth.

This is why even in the face of difficulties and divisions, Christians cannot be resigned nor yield to discouragement. The Lord asks this of us: to persevere in prayer in order to keep alive the flame of faith, love and hope which nourishes the desire for full unity. "*Ut unum sint!*", says the Lord. May Christ's invitation always resound in our hearts, an invitation I was able to relaunch on my recent Apostolic Journey in the United States of America, when I referred to the centrality of prayer in the ecumenical movement. In this epoch of globalization and at the same

time of fragmentation, "without [prayer], ecumenical structures, institutions and programs would be deprived of their heart and soul" (*Ecumenical Prayer Service and Meeting*, St Joseph's Church, New York, 18 April 2008). Let us give thanks to the Lord for the goals reached in ecumenical dialogue thanks to the Holy Spirit's action; let us be docile, listening to his voice so that our hearts, filled with hope, may continuously seek the path that leads to the full communion of all Christ's disciples.

In his Letter to the Galatians, St Paul recalls that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5: 22-23). These are the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we also implore today for all Christians, so that in the common and generous service to the Gospel, they may be a sign of God's love for humanity in the world. Let us turn our gaze confidently to Mary, the Shrine of the Holy Spirit and through her pray: "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love". Amen.

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To special groups

I offer a warm welcome to the Delegates taking part in the Annual Conference of the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland. I am also pleased to greet the pilgrims from Our Lady of the Rosary Church in Qatar. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those from England, Scotland, Australia, India, Indonesia, Korea, Canada, Guam and the United States, I cordially invoke Almighty God's abundant blessings of joy and peace.

Lastly, I would like to greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly weds*. Dear *young people*, in this month of May that has just begun and that popular tradition dedicates to Mary, may you learn from her to do God's will always. In contemplating the Mother of the Crucified Christ, may you, dear *sick people*, be able to recognize the saving value of every cross; and you, dear *newly weds*, may you entrust yourselves to the Blessed Virgin's protection in order to create in your family that atmosphere of prayer and serenity that prevailed in the House of Nazareth.

Appeal for the Myanmar people

I make my own the cry of pain, the cry for help of the beloved people of Myanmar who have seen a vast number of lives claimed as well as their property and livelihood suddenly destroyed by the horrifying violence of Cyclone *Nargis*.

As I have already assured them in my Message of solidarity sent to the President of the Bishops' Conference, I am spiritually close to the people afflicted. I would also like to repeat to everyone the invitation to open their hearts to compassion and generosity so that the suffering caused by such a terrible calamity may be alleviated, thanks to the collaboration of all who are able and desire to go to their rescue.

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