

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
ON THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS KAREKIN II
CATHOLICOS OF THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE**

Thursday, 9 November 2000

*Your Holiness,
Dear and Venerable Brother,*

"He who loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling" (1 Jn 2:10)

This fraternal meeting brings us together in the light which is Christ. May the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ shine upon us, and may the Lord save us from stumbling as we journey forward in friendship.

For me it is a great source of joy and consolation to welcome Your Holiness today, together with the distinguished company that has come with you. I greet the illustrious prelates, priests and lay people, representing the Apostolic Armenian Church as a whole. I welcome His Excellency the Minister for Religious Affairs of the Republic of Armenia. You are all welcome here, and I trust that you will feel at home.

With a sense of deep emotion, Your Holiness, I recall the stay here in the Vatican of your Predecessor, the much lamented Karekin I, who was a guest here from 23-26 March 1999. Although already gravely ill, he wished to attend the Opening of the *Rome-Armenia* Exhibition, and to make a personal visit to me. My ties with him were deep, and I very much wanted to visit him in Armenia, as a sign of our friendship. But circumstances made that impossible. I ask the Lord to fill his faithful servant with his light and joy in the communion of the saints in heaven.

The visit of Your Holiness to the Church of Rome and to its Bishop falls during the Jubilee of the Year 2000. On 18 January of this year, at the opening of the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, I had the joy of crossing the threshold of the Holy Door in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, side by side with representatives of many other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. I thank Your Holiness for uniting yourself with this event by sending a representative of the Holy See of Etchmiadzin. On that solemn occasion, I expressed the hope, which I renew today, "that the *year of grace 2000* will be for all the disciples of Christ a time to give new impulse to our ecumenical commitment, accepting it as *an imperative for Christian consciences*. Upon this depends in large part the future of evangelization, the proclamation of the Gospel to the men and women of our time" (*Homily*, 18 January 2000).

Soon there will be another Jubilee: the celebration of the seventeen hundredth anniversary of the Baptism of Armenia. Your presence here today, dear Brother, affords me the opportunity to wish the Armenian Church a Jubilee year rich in spiritual blessings and pastoral benefits. We will join with you as, throughout the time of the Jubilee, you raise your prayer of intercession and thanksgiving to the Lord. The anniversary of the Baptism of Armenia will surely inspire celebrations and manifestations evoking the history of the Armenian people and the Armenian Church. That is a history in which grandeur and persecution, joy and sorrow, are intermingled. How often have the sons and daughters of Armenia cried out to the Lord in the heart-rending words of Saint Gregory of Narek: "I implore you now, O Lord, you who care for souls laid low by affliction through grave and agonizing illness. Do not add pain to my groanings; I am wounded, pierce me not; I am punished, condemn me not; I am maltreated, torment me not! Send me not into exile, for already I suffer persecution" (*The Book of Prayer*, XVII). The Armenian Church has paid dearly for its fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus Christ! At the Ecumenical Commemoration of the Witnesses of Faith of the Twentieth Century, on 7 May this year, we recalled in a special way the immense sufferings of the Armenian people. Again, I thank Your Holiness for your willingness to be part of that Liturgy in the person of your representative. In effect, "perhaps the most convincing form of ecumenism is the ecumenism of the saints and of the martyrs. The *communio sanctorum* speaks louder than the things which divide us" (Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 37).

By God's grace, Armenia has found new freedom and independence. Yet Armenia still faces enormous challenges. On the social and economic level, the areas severely hit by the earthquake in 1988 must be restored, and the country's industry and commerce must be revitalized. On the cultural and religious level, there is still much to be done to fill the spiritual void left behind by a godless and collectivist ideology. Expectations are high, but so too are the difficulties. It is my hope that the Armenian people, with their rich diversity, will find ways of meeting these challenges with a sense of commitment shared by all. The hour of freedom has sounded, and now is the time for solidarity. The Catholic Church wants to stand with the Apostolic Armenian Church, to support its spiritual and pastoral ministry to the Armenian people, in complete respect for its way of life and characteristic identity. To this the Lord is calling us, and we cannot disregard the occasions which the Spirit offers us to work together and to bear common witness.

Dear and venerable Brother in Christ, let us pray to the Lord that this pilgrimage of yours to the Tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and this first visit of yours to the See of the Successor of Peter, will strengthen the bonds between the Catholic Church and the Apostolic Armenian Church. Let our prayer together be that the communion which we are experiencing today will open new ways to peace and reconciliation between us.

May the all-holy Mother of God protect the Armenian Church wherever Armenian Christians bear witness to the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord, *yesterday, today and for ever*.

© Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana