



The Holy See

VISIT OF HIS BEATITUDE TEOCTIST,
PATRIARCH OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ROMANIA

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 13 October 2002

The Holy Father introduced Patriarch Teoctist to the faithful who then addressed the Pope and the faithful at the Mass. Here is a translation of the Pope's words.

Today our liturgical assembly has the great joy of welcoming our beloved Brother, H.B. Teoctist, Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Romania. His visit fills us with great hope; he is here to direct his fervent prayers, as we do, to the one Lord Jesus Christ for the full unity of all Christians.

Welcome Your Beatitude! Thank you for your gracious presence and for the words you will now address to us.

Homily of Patriarch Teoctist

1. *"To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever"* (Phil 4,20).

The passage of the Letter to the Philippians just proclaimed concludes this way. The Letter of the Apostle Paul is permeated with *fervent joy*. Today the same joy fills the heart of the Bishop of Rome on account of the gracious visit of his beloved Brother, His Beatitude Teoctist, Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Romania, and for having been able to listen with him to the Good News.

With fraternal affection, I greet you, Your Beatitude, and those who work with you. Spiritually, I cordially greet the Holy Synod, the clergy and the faithful of the Orthodox Church of Romania, who opened their arms and hearts to me on the occasion of my visit to Bucharest in the spring of 1999 three years ago.

2. I listened with great attention to your inspired reflections, that vibrate with ardent longing for the full communion of our Churches. In them I discerned an encouraging harmony of sentiments and will desiring to obey the commandment that Christ entrusted to his disciples during the Last Supper: "*Ut omnes unum sint* - that they all may be one" (Jn 17,21).

Your Beatitude, I am delighted to be able to celebrate in your presence this sacred liturgy, the mystery of our faith, and with you to beg the Lord *for unity and peace* in the holy Church and in the world. Together, in this church, we are *witnesses of the common journey* we have set out on towards the reunion of the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church of Romania. I praise the Lord for all he has already obtained for us in our pilgrimage of communion. I beg his grace, so that he may grant us to bring to fulfilment what he has inspired between us, in support of the dedication to full communion.

3. "*Behold I have prepared everything ... all is ready, come!*" (cf. Mt 22,4).

In the passage of the Gospel just proclaimed in Latin and in Romanian, almost breathing "with two lungs", we heard resound the invitation to the royal wedding feast. *We are all invited*. The call of the merciful and faithful Father constitutes the very core of divine revelation and, particularly, of the Gospel. *We are all called*, called by name.

"*Come!*". The Lord has called us to *be part of his Church*, one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Through one Baptism we are incorporated into the one Body of Christ. But has our answer always been an unconditional "yes"? *Unfortunately, have we not sometimes refused this invitation?* Have we not perhaps torn the seamless tunic of the Lord by separating ourselves from one another? Yes! This reciprocal division of ours is contrary to his will.

May this harsh judgement not be applied to us: "*The wedding is ready but those invited were not worthy*" (Mt 22,8). One day we will be asked to account for all that we have done for the unity of Christians.

4. In his grace to us sinners, God has in these last times granted us to come much closer to one another, in prayer, word and action, moving toward the fullness of the unity that Jesus wanted for his disciples (cf. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 1). The consciousness of the fact that we are *invited together* to the royal wedding feast has grown in us. Christ left to us as his legacy, on the eve of his Passion, the living memorial of his Death and Resurrection, in which, under the appearances of the bread and the wine, he gives us his Body and his Blood. As the Second Vatican Council reaffirmed, the Eucharist is the source and the summit of all Christian life, the radiating centre of the ecclesial community (cf. the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 10, and cf. Decree *Christus Dominus*, n. 30).

The Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, celebrating the true Eucharist in accordance

with their respective traditions, already live at this moment in a profound, though not full, communion. May the blessed day come soon on which we will be able truly to live in its fullness our perfect communion. Today the invitation of the Gospel is addressed specifically to us. May God put us on guard from doing what they did: "*one went one to his farm, another to his business*" (Mt 22,5).

5. The king, in the Gospel parable, asked one of the guests: "*Friend, how did you enter without a wedding-garment?*" (Mt 22,12). These words challenge us. They remind us that we must prepare ourselves for the royal marriage feast by *putting on the Lord Jesus Christ* (cf. Rom 13,14; Gal 3,27).

Participation in the Eucharist presupposes conversion to a new life. Common participation, full communion also presupposes conversion. There is no true ecumenism without interior conversion and renewal of the mind (cf. *Unitatis redintegratio*, nn. 6-7), without overcoming prejudices and suspicion; without eliminating words, opinions and acts that do not reflect equitably and truthfully the condition of our separated brethren; without the will to begin to esteem the other, to create a reciprocal friendship, to foster fraternal love.

To reach full communion we must overcome our laziness and narrow-mindedness (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 48). We must foster *the spirituality of communion*, which is an ability "to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are a part of me". This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship" (*ibid.*, n. 43). We must ceaselessly nurture the passion for unity.

Your Beatitude has opportunely stressed that in Europe and in the world, that are largely secularized, there is a worrisome spiritual crisis. The common witness of Christians is thus becoming much more urgent.

6. Dear brothers and sisters, I entrust to the Lord these reflections which today acquire a special importance. In fact, this liturgy sees together the Successor of Peter, Bishop of Rome, and the Orthodox Patriarch of Romania. We *are both witnesses of the growing desire for unity and communion of our Churches*. Although we are familiar with the continuing difficulties, we both trust that our example may find a deep echo in every place where Catholics and Orthodox live side by side. May our witness foster the desire to recognize the other as a brother or sister and to be reconciled with him/her. This is the first indispensable condition for approaching, together, the one Table of the Lord.

Let us invoke the Spirit of unity and love and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, for this.

7. Finally, I would like to send an affectionate greeting to the Romanian people, in the rich variety that makes up their nation. I will never forget the historic visit that divine Providence granted me to make three years ago to Bucharest. The welcome, the warm feelings, the intense sentiments, the spiritual fervour and enthusiasm, the expectations of the people, especially of the young, and the words of hope: all of this has remained impressed on my heart. *Unitate, unitate*, unforgettable words at the end of my visit. *Unitate, unitate!* I thank God, for he now grants me to repay, in a certain way, the kindness that you showed me.

Your Beatitude, on your return home, assure everyone that Romania, which tradition describes with the beautiful title of, "the Garden of the Mother of God" is in the heart of the Bishop of Rome, who prays every day for the beloved Romanian people. May God always bless Romania!

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