



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR OF SIBERIA**

*To my Venerable Brother
Bishop Joseph Werth, S.J.
Titular Bishop of Bulna
Apostolic Administrator of Siberia*

I am particularly pleased to rejoice with you, the priests and the faithful of this local Church, on the occasion of the consecration of the Latin-rite cathedral in Novosibirsk, whose foundation-stone, which I blessed, was taken from the tomb of the Apostle Peter beneath the altar of the *Confessio* in the Vatican Basilica.

This event, which crowns a long period of great effort, is a particularly significant moment in the history of this Christian community. After the harsh, painful years of persecution, to which it was subjected during the communist regime together with other Christians of the former Soviet Union, it is now living in a climate of new-found religious freedom, which has enabled the Holy See to establish it as an Apostolic Administration. The Catholic faithful can therefore gather for prayer in the new cathedral, a symbol and prophetic sign of the one holy Church of which Christ, who died and rose, is the Head and foundation.

The solemn consecration of this new church, certainly a historic event, testifies that the martyrs did not shed their blood in vain and that the cry of their sufferings was heard by God.

Dispersed in a vast territory, isolated and persecuted, in past years Siberian Catholics were able to offer a generous witness of faith in Jesus Christ and of fidelity to the Roman Pontiff. Today the presence among them of the Bishop, a Successor of the Apostles, and the restored visibility of

their identity as the People of God are an opportunity for them to commit themselves with new zeal "like living stones [to being] ... built into a spiritual house ... a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2:5). In this commitment to building the Church, they will not fail to foster cordial collaboration with their brothers and sisters of the Orthodox Church and of the other Christian Communities in Siberia, which have also been marked by the effects of State atheism.

I warmly hope that the Catholics of Siberia will shine with living faith and active charity, bringing to those near and far the glad tidings of salvation. Thus the new cathedral, which contains a special symbol of communion with the See of Peter, will increasingly become a privileged place for growing in faith through reflection on God's word, community prayer and the liturgical celebration of the divine mysteries.

Dear Brother, with these wishes I impart a special Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of heavenly favours to you, to the priests, to the religious, to those taking part in the sacred rite and to the whole Catholic Church Community in Siberia.

From the Vatican, 29 June 1997, the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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