



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO HIS HOLINESS MORAN IGNATIUS ZAKKA I IWAS  
SYRIAN PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH**

*Thursday, 21 June 1984*

*Your Holiness,*

God's love, which "has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (*Rom. 5, 5*), enables us to meet together as brothers during your visit to the Church of Rome and gives me the great joy of receiving you. It is in this love of the Lord that with all my heart I bid you welcome.

As an Observer at the Second Vatican Council you met my predecessor John XXIII. You accompanied Mar Ignatius Jacob III when he came to visit Paul VI, nor do I forget our own first meeting. But your presence here now has a new and particular importance. First of all, I welcome in your person the head of the very ancient Syrian Church which has its roots in the apostolic community of Antioch. Since after the pattern of the Good Shepherd the Bishop is intimately linked with his flock, in greeting you I greet all your faithful. To you, to His Beatitude The Catholicos, to those worthy representatives of your Church who are with you, to your clergy and all your people I give a heartfelt and brotherly greeting, full of esteem for your Church, whose history is so glorious, though marked by suffering, for its venerable traditions of theology, liturgy, spirituality and discipline and for the courageous witness it bears today to the Cross and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is another reason which increases our joy and gives particular importance to this moment. Your visit has its place in the series begun by your venerated predecessor Patriarch Mar Jacob III, which aimed at forging again the links between our Churches, which have been strained to the point of separation and ignorance of each other. I now meet you in Rome as Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church. You come to contribute to hastening the progress towards full communion between us. You know how much that wish is one with my own and with the solemn

commitment which the Catholic Church made at the Second Vatican Council to enter fully and actively into the ecumenical movement. To give practical expression to this desire with which the Holy Spirit has filled us, we are able on this occasion to make together a joint declaration of our common faith in Christ, the Son of God who through the Holy Spirit was made man by taking flesh of the Virgin Mary. We thus mark real progress on the path to unity, and we hope that, having confessed together Jesus Christ true God and true man as our one Lord, he will give us the grace to overcome the divergences which remain and which hinder full canonical and Eucharistic communion between us. We bless God for what we have regained in brotherhood already and for the advances we have made together.

Because our Lord Jesus Christ prayed for the unity of his own, "that the world might believe" (*Io.* 17, 21), and gave himself that all men might be reconciled with each other and with the Father, we must ever be his ready instruments for the restoration of visible unity between Christians and for peace between all people.

"Concern for restoring unity touches the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone according to the ability of each, whether it be exercised in daily Christian living or in theological and historical studies" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 5). The faithful of our Churches should meet still more, learn to know each other better and together bear better witness to the Gospel of Christ. The full possibilities of common witness in prayer, in solidarity, in mutual aid and the service of those in need have not yet been sufficiently exploited. Here the clergy of our Churches can have a decisive influence. Already in many places there is pastoral collaboration in response to the needs of the faithful. I would like this to develop everywhere with courage, confidence and respect. As for theological and historical researches, these have already produced appreciable results, particularly within the framework of meetings of the "Pro Oriente Foundation", between representatives of the Catholic Church and the ancient Oriental Churches. We should continue them so that they mark fresh progress for the glory of God.

If I speak thus of the urgent need to affirm together our common vocation to unity, it is not because our Churches are concerned only with their own problems. Christ is the light of the nations and it is to testify to his light that Christians ought always to look to do his will. The world needs the message of peace and the reality of salvation brought by Christ. Some of the faithful of our Churches live in lands ravaged by war and violence. In grave circumstances they are called to live the Gospel Beatitudes and to be agents of reconciliation. My thoughts and my prayers reach out to them at this moment. May God move the governments of nations in conflict so that hatred may be banished and firm concord be established between peoples.

In spite of the strength of brotherly love that unites us, we often feel weak and defenceless in the face of so many needs and so much suffering; but we do not lose courage. We fix our eyes on the "pioneer of our faith", and we know that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (*Hebr.* 12, 1-2) who are our fathers in faith, the saints and martyrs interceding for us. They have prayed

and fought for the faith, for the unity of the Church and for love among Christians. Living now in Christ, they sustain us and draw us after them.

Your Holiness, I thank you most sincerely for your visit. I know that your stay in this city is also a pilgrimage to the place of martyrdom of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, whose memory is very dear to the Church of Antioch, as it is to that of Rome. Through their intercession may God bless us, our clergy and all the faithful of our Churches.

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