



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY OF ORGANIZATIONS
FOR AID TO THE EASTERN CHURCHES**

Thursday, 27 June 2002

*Your Eminence,
Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Members and Friends of ROACO,*

1. I am especially pleased to offer each one of you a cordial welcome, expressing my gratitude for this courteous visit on the occasion of the annual meeting of the Assembly of Organizations for Aid to the Eastern Churches (ROACO).

I cordially greet Cardinal Ignace Moussa I Daoud, Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches and President of ROACO. With him I greet the Secretary, Archbishop Antonio Maria Vegliò, and the Congregation's staff as well as the heads of the various relief agencies. Thank you all for your active participation in the Pope's concern for the Eastern Churches.

As I notice that, despite present difficulties, the generous commitment of the agencies you represent is not diminishing, I would like to repeat what I said in my Apostolic Letter *Orientale lumen*: "Western communities will make it their duty above all to share, where possible, service projects with their brothers and sisters in the Eastern Churches, or to assist in bringing to a successful conclusion all that the latter are doing to help their people (n. 23).

2. At this moment I recall my recent visit to Bulgaria and, particularly, to Plovdiv where I beatified the martyrs Fr Pavel Djidjov, Kamen Vitchev and Josaphat Chichkov. Like so many others who often remain unknown, these genuine witnesses of Christ have the merit of having kept alive the torch of faith during the rigorous winter of atheism in the last century, and of handing it on, more

alive than ever, to the generation that followed.

Their beatification was not only the high point of my whole pilgrimage, but the clearest and most luminous seal on the esteem and affection that binds me to the noble Bulgarian people. I invite you to pray God for them to grant them long days of progress, prosperity and peace.

I wish to point out to you those beloved Christian communities so that you may have them even more at heart and continue to sustain them in their need. Above all I urge you not to disappoint the expectations of the young people, to help Christian families and to favour in every way the formation of candidates to the priesthood and to the religious life.

3. The special attention with which the Apostolic See follows the developments of the situation in the Holy Land and, more generally, the continuation of the state of tension in the Middle East, impels me strongly to recommend to your concern your brothers and sisters in the faith who live there. I am certain that your efforts, also through the traditional collection for the Holy Land, will bring concrete signs of Christian solidarity to those tormented regions, from the most varied parts of the world. I am likewise persuaded that your beneficial action will meet with a grateful response from the pastors and faithful of the Eastern Catholic Churches and of the Latin community of the Holy Land. That blessed land, in which the Saviour was born, lived, died and rose, is a world heritage of spirituality and a treasure whose value is beyond compare.

The pilgrims who go to the Holy Places every year are well aware of this. After praying and coming into contact with the Gospel in the unforgettable setting of those sites, they return to their communities enriched by an extraordinary experience. They have realized that alongside the shrines there lives an active community of believers who consist of faithful who belong to various rites, with traditions that have their roots in the typical plurality of the Church of the early centuries.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, your commitment is to respond ever more attentively and rapidly to the needs of the Eastern Catholic Churches, seeking the ready involvement of the local communities. With special sessions for reflection and study meetings, you help to plan your contribution and to identify pastoral plans in accord with the recognized priorities of evangelization, charity and education. I congratulate you, and I desire to encourage you to continue with generosity and farsightedness on the path you have undertaken, that will yield great good for the whole Church.

In this very important process, you have the Congregation for the Eastern Churches beside you. It sustains the various initiatives you promote in the fields of education and knowledge of the liturgy, and the commitment to formation and practical pastoral planning.

It is also the Congregation's duty to meet the needs of the seminarians and priests, men and women religious and lay people who are sent to Rome by their bishops and superiors to complete

their spiritual and pastoral formation, to learn about the various ecclesial realities and to finish their advanced studies in the ecclesiastical disciplines.

May the ecclesial communities of the East, helped by the Congregation for the Eastern Churches and by ROACO, live a more and more intense evangelical life and a renewed apostolic zeal.

5. Dear brothers and sisters, may the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, strengthen you in your good resolutions. May she support you in your effort to combine with your charitable words, charitable deeds, expressed in many signs of solidarity and brotherhood.

I too am close to you with my affection and prayers, and cordially impart to each one of you present here a special Apostolic Blessing, which I gladly extend to your dear ones, to the Churches you belong to, to the agencies you represent and to all who benefit from the initiatives you are involved in.