



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO AZERBAIJAN AND BULGARIA

VISIT TO THE BYZANTINE-SLAVONIC CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Sofia

Saturday, 25 May 2002

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. "*Peace be with you. Bless God for ever*" (Tob 12:17). I am pleased to meet you in this Cathedral dedicated to the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I affectionately greet your Apostolic Exarch Christo Proykov, and I thank him for his kind words to me. I fraternally embrace the Exarch Emeritus Metodi Stratiev, who endured persecution and prison together with *the three Assumptionist priests* whom I shall proclaim Blessed tomorrow in Plovdiv. I extend cordial greetings also to all the priests of the Exarchate and to the faithful entrusted to their pastoral care and represented here.

With special affection I greet the Carmelite Nuns and the Sisters of the Eucharist, remembering particularly those among them — alive here on earth or already in heaven — who during the period of Communist domination experienced *long confinement in the choir of the Church of Saint Francis*, keeping alive the ideals of their consecration and supporting through prayer and penance the fidelity of Christians to their Lord.

Together with you, I remember with admiration and gratitude the figure and work of the Apostolic Delegate Archbishop Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, *Blessed Pope John XXIII*, who prayed in this Cathedral and did so much for the life of the Byzantine-Slavonic Rite Catholic Church in Bulgaria. May the relic of him, which I have brought as a gift from Rome, be kept and venerated in the soon-

to-be-built church which, in accordance with your desire, will be dedicated to his name.

The same courageous faith of those who have preceded you in the Catholic Church in Bulgaria calls you to a fervent renewal of your witness to Christ the Lord today. Strengthened by the command given to Peter by Jesus himself, I for my part wish to support you and confirm you in this commitment of yours. May the Lord accompany you and assist you in the generous intentions of your Christian life and, through the intercession of his Most Blessed Mother, venerated under the title of Patroness of Christian Unity in the Shrine of the Most Holy Trinity at Malko Tŕrnovo, may he grant you the abundance of his blessings.