

**ECUMENICAL CELEBRATION PRESIDED OVER BY THE HOLY FATHER
ON THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS CATHOLICOS KAREKIN II
SUPREME PATRIARCH AND CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 9 May 2008*

*Your Holiness,
Dear Brothers in Christ,*

It is with heartfelt joy that I welcome Your Holiness, and the distinguished delegation accompanying you. I cordially greet the prelates, priests and lay-people who represent the worldwide family of the Catholicosate of All Armenians. We come together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who promised his disciples that "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (*Mt 18:20*). May the spirit of brotherly love and service, which Jesus taught to his disciples, enlighten our hearts and minds, as we exchange our greetings, hold our conversations and gather in prayer.

I gratefully recall the visits of Catholicos Vasken I and Catholicos Karekin I to the Church of Rome, and their cordial relations with my venerable predecessors Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II. Their striving for Christian unity opened a new era in relations between us. I recall with particular joy Your Holiness' visit to Rome in 2000 and your meeting with Pope John Paul II. The ecumenical liturgy in the Vatican Basilica, celebrating the gift of a relic of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, was one of the most memorable events of the Great Jubilee in Rome. Pope John Paul II returned that visit by travelling to Armenia in 2001, where You graciously hosted him at Holy Etchmiadzin. The warm welcome you gave him on that occasion further increased his esteem and respect for the Armenian people. The Eucharist celebrated by Pope John Paul II on the great outdoor altar, within the enclosure of Holy Etchmiadzin, was a further sign of growing mutual acceptance, in expectation of the day when we will be able to celebrate together at the one table of the Lord.

Tomorrow evening, each of us, in our respective traditions, will begin the liturgical celebration of Pentecost. Fifty days after the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will pray earnestly to the Father, asking him to send his Holy Spirit, the Spirit whose task it is to maintain us in divine love and lead us into all truth. We will pray in a particular way for the unity of the Church. On Pentecost day, it was the Holy Spirit who created from the many languages of the crowds assembled in Jerusalem one single voice to profess the faith. It is the Holy Spirit who brings about the Church's unity. The path towards the restoration of full and visible communion among all Christians may seem long and arduous. Much remains to be done to heal the deep and painful divisions that disfigure Christ's Body. The Holy Spirit, however, continues to guide the Church in surprising and often unexpected ways. He can open doors that are locked, inspire words that have been forgotten, heal relations that are broken. If our hearts and minds are open to the Spirit of communion, God can work miracles again in the Church, restoring the bonds of unity. Striving for Christian unity is an act of obedient trust in the work of the Holy

Spirit, who leads the Church to the full realization of the Father's plan, in conformity with the will of Christ.

The recent history of the Armenian Apostolic Church has been written in the contrasting colours of persecution and martyrdom, darkness and hope, humiliation and spiritual re-birth. Your Holiness and the members of your delegation have personally lived through these contrasting experiences in your families and in your own lives. The restoration of freedom to the Church in Armenia has been a source of great joy for us all. An immense task of rebuilding the Church has been laid on your shoulders. I cannot but voice my great esteem for the remarkable pastoral results that have been achieved in such a short time, both in Armenia and abroad, for the Christian education of young people, for the training of new clergy, for building new churches and community centres, for charitable assistance to those in need, and for promoting Christian values in social and cultural life. Thanks to your pastoral leadership, the glorious light of Christ shines again in Armenia and the saving words of the Gospel can be heard once more. Of course, you are still facing many challenges on the social, cultural and spiritual levels. In this regard, I must mention the recent difficulties suffered by the people of Armenia, and I express the prayerful support of the Catholic Church in their search for justice and peace and the promotion of the common good.

In our ecumenical dialogue, important progress has been made in clarifying the doctrinal controversies that have traditionally divided us, particularly over questions of Christology. During the last five years, much has been achieved by the *Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches*, of which the Catholicosate of All Armenians is a full member. I thank Your Holiness for the support given to the work of the Joint Commission and for the valuable contribution made by your representatives. We pray that its activity will bring us closer to full and visible communion, and that the day will come when our unity in faith makes possible a common celebration of the Eucharist. Until that day, the bonds between us are best consolidated and extended by agreements on pastoral issues, in line with the degree of doctrinal agreement already attained. Only when sustained by prayer and supported by effective cooperation, can theological dialogue lead to the unity that the Lord wishes for his disciples.

Your Holiness, dear friends: in the twelfth century, Nerses of Lambron addressed a group of Armenian Bishops. He concluded his famous Synodal Discourse on the restoration of Christian unity with visionary words, that still affect us today: *"You are not wrong, Venerable Fathers: it is meritorious to weep over days past in discord. However, today is the day that the Lord has made, a day of gladness and joy (...) Let us then pray in order that our Lord give tenderness, sweetness in greater abundance still, and that He develop on earth, by the dew of the Holy Spirit, this seed; perhaps, thanks to His power may we also produce fruits; so that we may restore the peace of the Church of Christ today in intention, tomorrow in fact"*. This is also my prayerful wish on the occasion of your visit. I thank you most warmly and assure you of my deep affection in the Lord.

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