

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 5 October 2016*

In Georgia, this mission naturally passes through cooperation with our Orthodox brothers, who make up the vast majority of the population. Therefore, it was highly significant that when I arrived at Tbilisi Airport, along with the President of the Republic, the Venerable Patriarch Ilia II was there to receive me. My meeting with him that afternoon was moving, as well as my visit to the Patriarchal Cathedral the following day, where the relic of the tunic of Christ, a symbol of the Church's unity, is venerated. This unity is reinforced by the blood of so many martyrs of the different Christian denominations. Among the most tried of communities is the Assyrian-Chaldean, with whom, in Tbilisi, I experienced an intense moment of prayer for peace in Syria, Iraq and throughout the Middle East.

The Mass with the Catholic faithful of Georgia — Latin, Armenian and Assyrian-Chaldean — was celebrated in memory of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Patroness of Missions: she reminds us that the real mission is never proselytism, but rather attraction to Christ, beginning with strong union with Him in prayer, adoration and concrete acts of charity, which is service to Jesus present in the least of our brothers. What the men and women religious do — those whom I met in Tbilisi and then in Baku — they do with prayer and charitable and promotional works. I encouraged them to be steadfast in the faith, with remembrance, courage and hope. Then there are the Christian families: how precious is their presence of welcome, accompaniment, discernment and integration into the community!

(Upon returning from the visit to Georgia, Pope Francis' words at the general audience in St. Peter's Square, 5 October 2016)