

APOSTOLIC VOYAGE IN ARMENIA
FAREWELL CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

*Zvartnotz International Airport
Yerevan, 27 September 2001*

*Your Excellency President Kocharian,
Your Holiness,
Dear Armenian Friends,*

1. The time has come to say farewell and to thank you, Mr President, and the members of the Government for the wonderful hospitality I have found in Armenia. I am grateful to everyone, authorities and collaborators, civil and military, the men and women of the media, to all who have given their time and skills to make this visit a success.

With deep emotion I express my thanks to you, Your Holiness, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos, and to the hierarchy and faithful of the Armenian Apostolic Church for the spirit of brotherly love and communion which we have shared in these days.

2. Farewell to you, dear Archbishop Nerses, Archbishop Vartan, Bishop Giuseppe, and to the priests, men and women religious, and laity of the Catholic Church. With intense joy we have celebrated together the mystery of our faith, and I have experienced at first hand your desire to work with all your fellow citizens for greater justice and a better life for all Armenians. The Pope keeps you in his heart, and God himself will give you strength to meet the challenges before you.

I express once more my esteem for the representatives of all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities who have taken part in the events of my visit. May all the followers of Christ grow in *trust and ecumenical friendship* as we move into the Third Millennium and travel the path of ever closer union and cooperation!

3. Thank you, people of Armenia, for the warmth of your friendship, for the prayer we have shared, for your yearning for Christian unity. Thank you most of all for the witness of your faith, a faith you have not abandoned in dark times, a faith which remains deeply rooted in your families and in your national life.

Throughout history, Mount Ararat has been a symbol of stability and a source of confidence for the Armenian people. Yet time and again that stability and confidence were sorely tested by violence and persecution. The Armenian people have paid dearly for their frontier existence, so much so that the words "holiness" and "martyrdom" have become almost identical in your vocabulary. The terrible events at the beginning of the last century which brought your people "to the brink of annihilation", the long years of totalitarian oppression, the devastation of a disastrous earthquake: none of these has been able to prevent the Armenian soul from regaining courage and recovering its great dignity.

4. It is true, these are difficult years, and your heart is sometimes weary and unsure. Many of your young people have left the land of their birth; there is not enough work and poverty persists; it is hard to keep striving for the common good. But, dear Armenian Friends, hold on to hope! Remember that you have put your trust in Christ and said yes to him for ever.

Supported by your Armenian brothers and sisters throughout the world you are committed to the task of rebuilding in freedom your country and your society.

The time is ripe for your nation to gather its cultural resources and spiritual energies in a great concerted effort to develop and prosper on the basis of the fundamental truths of your Christian heritage: the dignity of every human being, the centrality of the person in every relationship and situation, the moral imperative of equal justice for all, and solidarity with the weak and the less fortunate. I pray to the Lord that the leaders of Armenia and of the other peoples of the region will have the wisdom and perseverance to move forward courageously on the path of peace, for without peace there can be no genuine development and prosperity.

5. In saying farewell, I am filled with confidence, for I have seen your resilience and the nobility of your aspirations. May Armenian hearts ever repeat the words of your great poet Hovhannès Tumanian about the homeland:

"But still you live, standing erect in spite of all your wounds
on the mysterious journey of time, past and present,
still standing, wise and pensive, and sad, with your God . . .

And the dawn of life's happiness will come,
its light at last in thousands upon thousands of souls;
and on the sacred slopes of your Mount Ararat
will shine forth at last the flame of the time to come.

Then, with the dawn, new songs and new poems
will be on the lips of the poets".

May Saint Gregory the Illuminator and the great host of Armenian Martyrs and Saints watch over you now and in the future! And may the Mother of Christ, Ark of the New Covenant, guide Armenia to the peace which lies beyond the great flood, the peace of God who has set his bow in the clouds as a sign of his everlasting love (cf. *Gen 9:13*).

Thank you, Mr President! Thank you, dear Brother Karekin! Thank you all!