

JOHN PAUL II

MEETING WITH THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

*Tbilisi, Church of Saints Peter and Paul
Tuesday, 9 November 1999*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. With great affection I greet you, the members of the Catholic community of Georgia and the Caucasus: in a special way, I greet Monsignor Giuseppe Pasotto, the Apostolic Administrator, and you his "fellow workers for the Kingdom of God" (cf. *Col* 4:11) in this beloved land. Our meeting is taking place in the venerable Church of Saints Peter and Paul. This building, the only Catholic church to remain open in Tbilisi during the period of persecution, is an eloquent symbol of persevering fidelity to Christ and unbroken communion with the See of Peter. Let us thank Almighty God for the faith and courage which sustained the Catholic community during those difficult times and prepared the way for its present rebirth. May the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, who were united in the proclamation of the Gospel and in their martyrdom, watch over this portion of the Lord's flock and strengthen you as you face the challenges of a new chapter in Georgia's history!

2. A particular greeting goes to you, my brother priests, faithful servants of the Lord. Like the seed which falls to the ground and dies, only to produce much fruit (cf. *Jn* 12:24), your priestly ministry, carried on in hiddenness and humility, quietly enriches the soil from which, by God's grace, new and abundant spiritual fruit is now emerging. Through Holy Orders, you have been sacramentally configured to Christ, the head and shepherd of the Church. I urge you "to put on the mind of Christ" (cf. *Phil* 2:5) and to grow each day in that pastoral charity which has its origin in his Sacred Heart and reaches out to embrace all humanity. Under your leadership may the Catholic community in Georgia, in the richness of its expression in the Latin, Armenian and Chaldean traditions, be a sign to the nation of the unity and peace which are the Lord's gifts to those who trust in his promises.

You too, dear men and women religious, have a special place in the Pope's heart. Consecrated to the Lord, your commitment to the pursuit of perfect charity leads you to generous service of those in need, and those who, often without knowing it, are seeking the Kingdom of God amid the false promises of a world confused about right values. Your works of education and charity point to the Lord's presence and the healing power of his grace. I am especially grateful for the witness of charity given by all associated with the *Redemptor Hominis* Clinic, and for the outstanding work of *Caritas Georgia*.

3. I give my encouragement and support to the lay faithful of this blessed land of Georgia. In your families, your parishes and your associations, celebrate your faith in Christ, and be a leaven of the Gospel in society around you! You too have been consecrated, by your Baptism. You too have been sent forth, as members of God's priestly, royal and prophetic people as witnesses to the Gospel. Let the light of Christ scatter whatever shadows and darkness you may find in your own hearts and in the world around you. Do not be afraid to open yourselves to Christ and the purifying power of his love.

4. Dear friends, at the threshold of the Third Christian Millennium, may the Church in Georgia, freed from the restrictions of the past, look to the future with immense hope and work for a new springtime of the Gospel. May each one be a witness to Christ's peace, ever concerned to promote understanding and dialogue, especially with our Orthodox brothers and sisters. Commending the Catholic community of the Caucasus to the loving intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, I invoke abundant divine blessings upon you and your families.

(Pope John Paul II's words during a meeting with the Catholic community, Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Tbilisi, Tuesday 9 November 1999)