

POPE BENEDICT XVI'S APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO CYPRUS

4-6 June 2010

GREETING OF HIS BEATITUDE CHRYSOSTOMOS II

4 June 2010

Most Holy Pope of the First Rome, Benedict!

Welcome to the island of saints and martyrs. Your Holiness, this very place was the site of the Synagogue of the Jews, and from this site Barnabas and Paul spoke God's word to the Jews.

The word of God is not chained (2 *Tim* 2:9). The Spirit of God's love made flesh, crucified and risen could not remain only among the Jews. Jesus Christ came into the world to offer eternal salvation to all those who put their faith in him (cf. *Jn* 3:16).

They followed the command to offer the truth to the Nations as well. When the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus, who Luke tells us was a wise man, summoned the apostles and wished to hear the word of God (cf. *Acts* 13:7), immediately they went to the place before us, which was the seat of the civil administration of the island. Thus for the first time the Gentiles heard the word of God.

At this point Barnabas and Paul exchanged roles. Here the one who taught was not the Cypriot but the Roman citizen. From this moment on, Paul became the head of the mission. At this moment too, we see that his name changes. The name "Saul" no longer appears in the New Testament, and from this time forward, he is called "Paul".

In this city of Paphos we hear of Saint Paul's first miracle, which was the first of many to come. Here the first European with so important a public office was baptized in the name of the most Holy Trinity. Here we see the official fall of the first bastion of idolatry, and in its place we see exalted the radiant glory of the holy Cross, which slowly yet surely spread to the whole continent of Europe and marked the rest of its history.

Your Holiness, from this place the Christian roots of Europe began to spread, and our spiritual foundations the foundations of Europe's Christian culture are to be found precisely in this place, where we now stand with great emotion. For this reason, Cyprus is rightly called the Gate of the Christianization of Europe.

Your Holiness, from the year 45 A.D., when the Apostles set foot on our island, to the present day, the Church of Cyprus has had a continued and fruitful Christian pilgrimage. In this long journey she has negotiated many reefs, lived moonless nights, known many conquerors, passed between fire and the sword. Led by the light of the Holy Spirit, she has not only survived but continues to offer her Orthodox Christian witness, in fidelity to the mission inaugurated by God himself.

From 1974 to the present, however, Cyprus and her Church are experiencing the most difficult moments of their history. Turkey has barbarously invaded and conquered by force of arms 37% of our homeland.

In the case of our island too, Turkey has carried out its plan of national destruction. It has turned the Orthodox Christian of Cyprus out of their ancestral homes, where they had lived for centuries.

It has brought and is still bringing, hundreds of thousands of colonists from Anatolia, radically altering the demographic character of the population of Cyprus. It has also changed historical place-names, in an effort to substitute them with Turkish names.

This great martyrdom which the Church has endured together with our Christian people since 1974 will, we are certain, come to an end. The Lord in his kindness and mercy towards mankind will not disregard the suffering of his people.

Your Holiness, our people, which suffers and experiences this struggle under the guidance of our government leaders, asks also for your active cooperation.

We have great confidence in your help, especially in ensuring protection and respect for our sacred monuments and our cultural heritage as a whole. We are sure that the indelible Christian spirit and virtues will in the end prove superior to the occupying insistence of Turkey, which proclaims that it certainly desires to have a European future.

ORE, 9 June 2010