

VISIT TO ROME OF HIS BEATITUDE TEOCTIST

ARCHBISHOP OF BUCHAREST, METROPOLITAN OF MUNTENIA AND DOBROGEA

Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church

October 7-13, 2002

THE PATRIARCH IS WELCOMED TO ROME

October 7, 2002

On Monday October 7, at the end of his address to the pilgrims for St Josemaria, the Holy Father welcomed to Rome His Beatitude Teoctist, Patriarch of Romania. The Holy Father invited the pilgrims to give a warm welcome to the Patriarch and to pray for the success of his visit. Here is a translation of the Holy Fathers address of welcome, followed by the Patriarchs address.

THE POPE'S WELCOME ADDRESS

I have the joy of welcoming the Orthodox Patriarch of Romania, His Beatitude Teoctist, and the distinguished members of his delegation who have accompanied him to Rome for a visit that starts today. His Beatitude the Patriarch has just arrived and I wanted his visit to begin in the context of this General Audience, in the presence of so many of the faithful who have come from every part of the world.

Your Beatitude and dear Brother, you are making this visit motivated by my same sentiments and expectation! Meeting at the tomb of the Holy Apostles, Peter and Paul, is a sign of our common will to overcome the obstacles that still prevent the reestablishment of full communion between us.

This visit is also an act purifying our memories of division, of our often heated confrontations, of actions and words, which led to painful separation. However, the future is not a dark and unknown tunnel. It is already enlightened by God's grace; on it the life-giving light of the Spirit is already shining with comforting rays in it. This certainty does not only prevail over every human discouragement, over the tiredness that at times slows our steps; it convinces us above all that nothing is impossible for God, and therefore, if we are worthy of it, he will also grant us the gift of full unity.

I entrust to your prayers, dear faithful who are present, the visit to Rome of His Beatitude Teoctist, and I warmly hope that he may find in all who receive him on my behalf the same sentiments as those with which I welcome him today. May these days foster our dialogue, nourish our hopes and make us more aware of what unites us, our common roots of faith, our liturgical patrimony and of the saints and witnesses whom we have in common. May the Lord grant us once again to experience how beautiful, how joyful it is to call on him together!

ORE, October 9, 2002

THE PATRIARCH TEOCTIST'S ADDRESS

"There we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them for a week. And so we came to Rome" (Acts 28:14).

Your Holiness,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The disciple of the Apostle St Paul at Pozzuoli, the fast stop on his journey to: Rome, wrote these words. Like him, we too have come from the "Garden of the Mother of God" — as you, Your Holiness, so beautifully described Romania in your address to us, on your arrival in Romania in Spring 1999 — we have come to Rome because there are brethren here who serve and bear witness to Christ.

This is why, in the first place, we want to glorify the Good God who has enabled us, after more than three years since our unforgettable meeting in Bucharest, to continue in Rome those deeply spiritual moments. We meet here in brotherly response to the invitation you offered us, and to rejoice together with deep fraternal love. In the name of Christ, "yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13:8), I address a sincere greeting of fraternal love to you, Your Holiness, of fraternal joy at seeing you again. I extend a holy greeting to the clergy and faithful here, children of the Catholic Church or Romanian Orthodox who live permanently or temporarily in this hospitable country.

In the period that has passed since Your Holiness visited the Church and Nation of Romania, we have felt fully the holy joy that emerged from the boundless hope of those days. We have cherished in our hearts that spiritual joy which has yielded so many fruits; and those fruits have been communicated to the entire Christian and Romanian people of our country.

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The dignity of our holy Fathers, disciples of St Andrew the Apostle, ensured that the first country with an Orthodox majority to be visited by the Bishop of Rome was the Church founded in the land of our ancestors by the first disciple Christ called to follow him, St Andrew the Apostle, brother of the Apostle St Peter. We therefore bring you the joy of all the sons and daughters of the Romanian Orthodox Church as well as that of our other Christian brothers and sisters of Romania, in whose hearts our meeting in Bucharest instilled courage, vigour and love. These immensely valuable Christian virtues are still alive in the depths of their hearts.

With these values and this joy, we have come here today to the city of Rome which, for us Romanians, is the very source of our country's name and roots.

From these first moments of our presence here, we are steeped in the sentiment that we are walking in a place sanctified by the blood of thousands of Christians from the time of the persecutions, at the dawn of the Church. Among them, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul have a position of great respect. With their martyrdom, all those who confessed Christ passed from the eternal city of Rome to the eternal Kingdom of God.

But martyrdom has not remained a memory of the past. It has also been present in times closer to our own day, such as when the thousands of Christian martyrs who lived in Central and Eastern Europe died for their faith after living for decades in the terror of a godless ideology. Among them, the Christians of Romania, belonging to different Churches, gave the example of their suffering and sacrifice, entrusting their lives to Christ, the One who promised us heavenly grace, saying: "Come to me all who labour and are burdened and I will give you rest" (*Mt 11:28*).

Preserving in our hearts this model of courage and sacrifice for Christ, all of us, priests and faithful, who together constitute the chosen people of God and find ourselves in this blessed place, have the duty to follow their example and proclaim it to the ends of the earth.

Gathered together at this moment, and looking at you, we have before the eyes of our spirit the image of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down "in tongues of fire", enabling each one to understand the life communicating words of the Gospel of Christ. This image of the Church, which includes the faithful of so many countries who are united by the same faith in Christ, must strengthen us so that we may work with greater responsibility for the unity of the Church.

In a single greeting with all the Members of the Delegation of the Romanian Church, we thank you for your fraternal invitation and your warm words of welcome. We are now beginning this pilgrimage, with the loving sentiments of the blessed Romanian people who have preserved the Christian tradition, and we assure you, Your Holiness, and all of you who are present here, of our love and appreciation.

As we pray the Good Lord to direct our steps towards every good thing, let us say with the Psalmist, David, "Blessed be the name of the Lord now and forever"! (*Ps 112 LI 13*), 2).

ORE, October 16, 2002