



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO PILGRIMS OF THE GREEK-MELKITE COMMUNITY

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 30 November 2013*

*Your Beatitude,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I welcome you with joy before St Peter, where you have come to confirm the profound bond between the Church of Antioch for Greek-Melkites and his Successor. You come as witnesses of the Apostolic origins of our faith. From that moment, the joy of the Gospel continues to enlighten humanity and in it you walk, despite the many trials that you have met throughout history up to our day.

My thoughts turn directly to our brothers and sisters in Syria, who have been suffering a “great tribulation” for a long time; I pray for the many who have lost their lives and for their loved ones. May the Lord dry the tears of these children of his; may the closeness of the entire Church comfort them in their anguish and protect them from desperation.

We firmly believe in the power of prayer and reconciliation, and we renew our heartfelt appeal to Leaders that they desist from every kind of violence and seek dialogue through just and enduring solutions to this conflict that has already done far too much damage. In particular, I urge that there be mutual respect between different religious confessions, in order to ensure for all a future based on the inalienable rights of the person, including religious freedom. For centuries, your Church has understood how to live peacefully with other religions and is called to fulfill a role of brotherhood in the Middle East.

Let me also repeat this to you: let us not resign ourselves to thinking of a Middle East without

Christians. Yet, many of your brothers and sisters have emigrated, and a large group of the community in the diaspora is present here today. I encourage you to keep the human and spiritual roots of your Melkite tradition strong, guarding the Greek-Catholic identity everywhere for the entire Church needs the heritage of the Christian East, to which you are heirs. At the same time, you are a visible sign for everyone of our Eastern brothers of that wished for communion with the Successor of Peter. On this Feast of the Apostle St Andrew, brother of St Peter, my thoughts turn to His Holiness Bartholomaios, Patriarch of Constantinople, and to the Orthodox Churches, so many Sister Churches.

Let us pray to the Lord that he help us to proceed on the path of ecumenism, in fidelity to the principles of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. May he help you always collaborators to be in evangelization, cultivating an ecumenical and interreligious sensitivity. This is possible thanks to unity, to which the disciples of Christ are called (cf. Acts 4:32); and unity always requires conversion on the part of everyone. In this regard, the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* offers very effective guidelines for both the pastors and the faithful to live out with generosity their respective responsibilities in the Church and society. The divisions within our communities gravely obstruct Church life, communion and witness. I accompany, therefore, the Patriarch and the Bishops in this endeavour, that they may thereby contribute to building up the Body of Christ. But I would also like to encourage priests, men and women religious and lay faithful to make their own contribution.

Let us invoke the intercession of the Most Holy Mother of God, of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and of St Andrew, to whom we turn with the words of the Byzantine tradition: "You, as the first-called of the Apostles, as brother of the Coryphaeus, entreat the Lord Almighty that peace be granted unto the world and great mercy to our souls" (*Apolytikion della Memoria*). I affectionately impart to you and to your communities my Apostolic Blessing.