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VISITA UFFICIALE A PAPA GIOVANNI PAOLO II E ALLA CHIESA DI ROMA DEL PATRIARCA SUPREMO E CATHOLICOS DI TUTTI GLI ARMENI, KAREKIN II (8-11 NOVEMBRE 2000) - II

Alle ore 18 di questo pomeriggio il Santo Padre Giovanni Paolo II riceve in udienza Sua Santità Karekin II, Patriarca Supremo e Catholicos di tutti gli Armeni, che ha iniziato ieri la Sua Visita ufficiale al Papa e alla Chiesa di Roma.

Al termine dell'incontro privato con il Catholicos Karekin II, nella Sala Clementina del Palazzo Apostolico il Santo Padre saluta la Delegazione di Fedeli della Chiesa Armena, giunti al Seguito del Patriarca.

Di seguito riportiamo i discorsi che Sua Santità Karekin II e il Santo Padre Giovanni Paolo II pronunciano nella Sala Clementina:

• DISCORSO DI SUA SANTITÀ KAREKIN II

Your Holiness, Dearly Beloved Brother in Christ:

Christ in our midst has been revealed;

He Who Is, God, is here seated. The voice of peace has resounded; Holy greeting is commanded. This Church has now become one soul, The kiss is given for a full bond. The enmity has been removed; And love is spread over us all.

[The Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Church]

The 2000th year of the Holy Birth of our Lord unites us in glorious fraternity, and we greet you with the words of the Armenian Divine Liturgy, the vivifying tidings of the mystery of the Holy Sacrament.

Glory to God in the Highest for granting us, the 132nd occupant of the Throne of Holy Etchmiadzin, Mother See of the Armenian people, the joyous occasion and opportunity to exchange the kiss of peace with Your Holiness here in the heart of Rome. May our encounter today serve as a testimony to the kinship between the apostolic

thrones of St. Peter and St. Thaddeus.

When last we stood on this hallowed ground, only a year and a-half ago, we were in the company of our predecessor of blessed memory, His Holiness Karekin I, Catholicos of All Armenians, who had been invited by Your Holiness to partake in the opening of the Vatican's Rome-Armenia Exhibition.

On this occasion, too, we feel the Presence of the restorative and life-giving Holy Spirit of God. Beginning with the historic embrace between our predecessors, Pope Paul VI and Catholicos Vasken I, the Holy Spirit has guided our two Sees to frequently attest to unity in Christ. Divine Providence has enabled us to confront violence, injustice, corruption and the error characteristic of our times. These very challenges prompt the Church of Christ to strengthen her God-pleasing quest for unity and solidarity of purpose, always confident that "the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18).

As the Patriarch of the Armenian people, we rejoice that the peal of Christian brotherhood and unity within the Church of Christ is being trumpeted from the very center of the Roman Catholic Church, the Vatican, and from the very heart and soul of her most graceful pontiff. It would be impossible for such a sound not to echo in Armenia: that land thriving under the biblical Mount Ararat, which has faithfully served for centuries as the tireless gatekeeper of the Christian East--and remains so to this day.

That peal is especially dear to our own heart, for in it we recognize the spirit of the Gospel and its invincible message of love and brotherhood, before which all obstacles are powerless. So long as we mutually reinforce the solidarity among Christian churches, we are convinced that throughout the Third Millennium the Church of Christ will flourish on its Divinely-established, Apostolic path.

Today our heart abounds with happiness, as we come--accompanied by high-ranking clergymen of the Armenian Church and representatives of our people from around the world--to receive the relic of our patron saint, St. Gregory the Illuminator. In restoring this relic to the Armenians, the Catholic Church bears witness to the brotherhood between our two ancient churches; with solemn gratitude we will escort these sacred remains to Holy Etchmiadzin, to be reunited with the relic of the Illuminator's right hand.

Your Holiness, beloved brother in Christ: In the name of the Holy Apostolic Armenian Church, we offer our gratitude for this testimony of love and respect. It demonstrates your high esteem for the Armenian Church, your appreciation of her heritage, and your recognition that her history is founded upon the martyrdom of her people.

During its unique historical development, the Armenian Church managed to avoid isolation by setting her sights on the ideal of "Unity in essential matters, Liberty in doubtful matters, Charity in all things" (*Unitas in necessities, Libertas in dubiis, Caritas in omnibus*). Though remote, she remained an important member of the Body of Christ.

The independence of the Armenian Church is a sacred legacy from the distant past. The Armenian flock and its pastors have cherished this independence with great effort and zeal. And in appreciating our own God-given freedom and independence, we have always respected and esteemed the distinctive identities of others. During times of turmoil, under harsh conditions of a lost statehood, the Armenian Church kept alive the sacred ideal of freedom, preserved an aspiration for it in the souls of its people, and elevated the Armenian struggle to a cause "for the sake of the faith and for the sake of the fatherland" (as stated by the fifth-century historian Yeghishe).

It is our conviction that the dogmatic differences within the Church of Christ are an inescapable facet of our common history; they are the result of the attempt to express a single truth in distinct languages and modes of thought, in the aspiration to penetrate the depths of Divine revelation. Nevertheless, these same differences should not be understood as obstacles to brotherly fellowship, unity and love in Christ. It is in this sense that we profess the real and mystical unity of the Church.

Your Holiness: On the occasion of this meeting, it is our pleasure to renew our invitation to you, to visit the

Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin in Armenia, and to participate in the celebrations of the 1700th anniversary of the conversion of the Armenian people to Christianity. Your august presence during those festivities will be an honor both to the Armenian Church and to her children throughout the world.

It is the will of our Lord that the Armenian people should celebrate the turning-point in their ancient history under the free skies of a sovereign homeland. A century that began with the Genocide of the Armenians now concludes with a new hope. Fortified by their faith in the Resurrection, our people survived their greatest catastrophe, thus overcoming the evil of premeditated annihilation. They went on to plant the seeds of goodness and to nourish their faith in justice; and today, at the dawn of a new century, they await the universal recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide. They seek this so that, through the rejection of evil in the hearts of men, goodness might prevail and bear fruit--and the world may witness that God does forsake His creatures, for "he who seeks goodness finds goodwill" (Pr 11:27).

It remains our prayer that the Third Millennium may bring a new dawn of peace and tidings of reconciliation throughout the world. We offer prayers to our Heavenly Lord, the Risen Christ, that He may bless us, bless our churches, and bless His faithful flock entrusted to our care. Amen.

[02258-02.01] [Original text: English]

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE GIOVANNI PAOLO II

Your Holiness,

Dear and Venerable Brother,

"He who loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling" (1 Jn 2:10)

This fraternal meeting brings us together in the light which is Christ. May the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ shine upon us, and may the Lord save us from stumbling as we journey forward in friendship.

For me it is a great source of joy and consolation to welcome Your Holiness today, together with the distinguished company that has come with you. I greet the illustrious prelates, priests and lay people, representing the Apostolic Armenian Church as a whole. I welcome His Excellency the Minister for Religious Affairs of the Republic of Armenia. You are all welcome here, and I trust that you will feel at home.

With a sense of deep emotion, Your Holiness, I recall the stay here in the Vatican of your Predecessor, the much lamented Karekin I, who was a guest here from 23-26 March 1999. Although already gravely ill, he wished to attend the Opening of the *Rome-Armenia* Exhibition, and to make a personal visit to me. My ties with him were deep, and I very much wanted to visit him in Armenia, as a sign of our friendship. But circumstances made that impossible. I ask the Lord to fill his faithful servant with his light and joy in the communion of the saints in heaven.

The visit of Your Holiness to the Church of Rome and to its Bishop falls during the Jubilee of the Year 2000. On 18 January of this year, at the opening of the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, I had the joy of crossing the threshold of the Holy Door in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, side by side with representatives of many other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. I thank Your Holiness for uniting yourself with this event by sending a representative of the Holy See of Etchmiadzin. On that solemn occasion, I expressed the hope, which I renew today, "that the *year of grace 2000* will be for all the disciples of Christ a time to give new impulse to our ecumenical commitment, accepting it as *an imperative for Christian consciences*. Upon this depends in large part the future of evangelization, the proclamation of the Gospel to the men and women of our time" (*Homily*, 18 January 2000).

Soon there will be another Jubilee: the celebration of the seventeen hundredth anniversary of the Baptism of Armenia. Your presence here today, dear Brother, affords me the opportunity to wish the Armenian Church a

Jubilee year rich in spiritual blessings and pastoral benefits. We will join with you as, throughout the time of the Jubilee, you raise your prayer of intercession and thanksgiving to the Lord. The anniversary of the Baptism of Armenia will surely inspire celebrations and manifestations evoking the history of the Armenian people and the Armenian Church. That is a history in which grandeur and persecution, joy and sorrow, are intermingled. How often have the sons and daughters of Armenia cried out to the Lord in the heart-rending words of Saint Gregory of Narek: "I implore you now, O Lord, you who care for souls laid low by affliction through grave and agonizing illness. Do not add pain to my groanings; I am wounded, pierce me not; I am punished, condemn me not; I am maltreated, torment me not! Send me not into exile, for already I suffer persecution" (*The Book of Prayer*, XVII). The Armenian Church has paid dearly for its fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus Christ! At the Ecumenical Commemoration of the Witnesses of Faith of the Twentieth Century, on 7 May this year, we recalled in a special way the immense sufferings of the Armenian people. Again, I thank Your Holiness for your willingness to be part of that Liturgy in the person of your representative. In effect, "perhaps the most convincing form of ecumenism is the ecumenism of the saints and of the martyrs. The *communio sanctorum* speaks louder than the things which divide us" (Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 37).

By God's grace, Armenia has found new freedom and independence. Yet Armenia still faces enormous challenges. On the social and economic level, the areas severely hit by the earthquake in 1988 must be restored, and the country's industry and commerce must be revitalized. On the cultural and religious level, there is still much to be done to fill the spiritual void left behind by a godless and collectivist ideology. Expectations are high, but so too are the difficulties. It is my hope that the Armenian people, with their rich diversity, will find ways of meeting these challenges with a sense of commitment shared by all. The hour of freedom has sounded, and now is the time for solidarity. The Catholic Church wants to stand with the Apostolic Armenian Church, to support its spiritual and pastoral ministry to the Armenian people, in complete respect for its way of life and characteristic identity. To this the Lord is calling us, and we cannot disregard the occasions which the Spirit offers us to work together and to bear common witness.

Dear and venerable Brother in Christ, let us pray to the Lord that this pilgrimage of yours to the Tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and this first visit of yours to the See of the Successor of Peter, will strengthen the bonds between the Catholic Church and the Apostolic Armenian Church. Let our prayer together be that the communion which we are experiencing today will open new ways to peace and reconciliation between us.

May the all-holy Mother of God protect the Armenian Church wherever Armenian Christians bear witness to the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord, yesterday, today and for ever.

[Saluto del Santo Padre in lingua armena] **Traduzione del saluto in lingua inglese**

Blessing and glory to the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Traduzione del saluto in lingua italiana

Benedizione e gloria al Padre e al Figlio e allo Spirito Santo, ora e sempre e nei secoli dei secoli. Amen.

[02259-02.01] [Original text: English]
