

Pope to Syriac Leader: Eucharist Is Key to Unity

Lauds Church's Efforts for Mideast Peace

VATICAN CITY, JUNE 19, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- In an audience with the patriarch of Antioch of the Syrians, Benedict XVI underlined the importance of the Eucharist as the key to unity.

The Pope affirmed this today at the Vatican when he met with Patriarch Ignace Youssif III Younan and some members of the Syriac synod.

The Pontiff stated that "Divine Providence has made us ministers of Christ and shepherds of his one flock."

He continued, "Christ himself, our Lord, appointed the Apostle Peter as the 'rock' upon which he founded the spiritual edifice of the Church, calling upon his disciples to remain in full unity with Peter, under his sure guidance and that of his Successors."

"Over the course of your millenarian history," the Holy Father told the patriarch, "your communion with the Bishop of Rome has always been accompanied by faithfulness to the spiritual tradition of the Christian East."

"These are complementary aspects of a single heritage of the faith which your venerable Church professes," he added.

Benedict XVI recalled how he immediately conceded ecclesiastical communion in a letter to the patriarch after the latter's election as head of the synod last February.

The Syriac Catholic Church separated from Rome after the Council of Chalcedon in 451, but returned to full communion more than a millennium later.

Communion

Thursday, the official ceremony of ecclesial communion was held in the Basilica of St. Mary Major, in the presence of the papal representative, Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, prefect of the Congregation for Eastern Churches.

"With a public sign," the Pope said, "yesterday's Eucharistic celebration in the basilica of St. Mary Major -- you most appropriately demonstrated the close ties binding you to the Bishop of Rome and the universal Church."

He added: "In effect, the Eucharist fuses our different traditions in the unity of the one Spirit, making them a source of wealth for all God's people.

"May the celebration of the Eucharist, source and summit of ecclesiastical life, keep you anchored in the ancient Syriac tradition which can claim to possess the language the Lord Jesus spoke, and at the same time open your horizons to ecclesial universality."

The see of the Syriac Catholic Church is in Beirut, Lebanon, and in its liturgy, it still uses Aramaic, the language spoken by Christ.

"The Eucharist is the Bread of Life that nourishes our communities and makes them grow in unity and charity," the Pontiff affirmed.

"In the Eucharist," he added, "Sacrament of unity and community, may you find the strength to overcome the difficulties your Church has faced over recent years, in order to rediscover the paths of forgiveness, reconciliation and communion."

The Holy Father encouraged this Church's "efforts being made to favor unity, understanding and forgiveness, which must always be considered as priorities for the edification of the Church of God."

He concluded, "I pray continuously, among other things, for peace in the Middle East, especially for Christians living in the blessed land of Iraq, whose sufferings I offer every day to God during the Eucharistic sacrifice."

There are some 150,000 Syrian Catholics in the world today. They live primarily in Iraq (42,000), in Syria (26,000), and in Turkey. About 55,000 Syrian Catholics live in other nations around the world.

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