

*His Holiness Leo XIV*

*Audience to Participants in the Jubilee of the Eastern Churches*

*May 14, 2025*

Paul VI Hall - Vatican City

Your Beatitudes, Your Eminence, Your Excellencies,

Dear priests, consecrated men and women,

Dear brothers and sisters,

Christ is risen. He is truly risen! I greet you in these words that Eastern Christians in many lands never tire of repeating during the Easter season, as they profess the very heart of our faith and hope. It is very moving for me to see you here during the Jubilee of Hope, a hope unshakably grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Welcome to Rome! I am happy to be with you and to devote one of the first audiences of my pontificate to the Eastern faithful.

You are precious in God's eyes. Looking at you, I think of the diversity of your origins, your glorious history and the bitter sufferings that many of your communities have endured or continue to endure. I would like to reaffirm the conviction of Pope Francis that the Eastern Churches are to be "cherished and esteemed for the unique spiritual and sapiential traditions that they preserve, and for all that they have to say to us about the Christian life, synodality, and the liturgy. We think of early Fathers, the Councils, and monasticism... inestimable treasures for the Church (Address to Participants in the Meeting of Aid Agencies for the Oriental Churches [ROACO], 27 June 2024).

I would also like to mention Pope Leo XIII, the first Pope to devote a specific document to the dignity of your Churches, inspired above all by the fact that, in his words, "the work of human redemption began in the East" (cf. Apostolic Letter *Orientalium Dignitas*, 30 November 1894). Truly, you have "a unique and privileged role as the original setting where the Church was born" (SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Oriente Lumen*, 5). It is significant that several of your liturgies – which you are now solemnly celebrating in Rome in accordance with your various traditions – continue to use the language of the Lord Jesus. Indeed, Pope Leo XIII made a heartfelt appeal that the "legitimate variety of Eastern liturgy and discipline... may redound to the great honor and benefit of the Church" (*Orientalium Dignitas*). His desire remains ever timely. In our own day too, many of our Eastern brothers and sisters, including some of you, have been forced to flee their homelands because of war and persecution, instability and poverty, and risk losing not only their native lands, but also,

when they reach the West, their religious identity. As a result, with the passing of generations, the priceless heritage of the Eastern Churches is being lost.

Over a century ago, Leo XIII pointed out that “preserving the Eastern rites is more important than is generally realized”. He went so far as to decree that “any Latin-Rite missionary, whether a member of the secular or regular clergy, who by advice or support draws any Eastern-Rite Catholic to the Latin Rite” ought to be “dismissed and removed from his office” (ibid). We willingly reiterate this appeal to preserve and promote the Christian East, especially in the diaspora. In addition to establishing Eastern circumscriptions wherever possible and opportune, there is a need to promote greater awareness among Latin Christians. In this regard, I ask the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches – which I thank for its work – to help me to define principles, norms, and guidelines whereby Latin Bishops can concretely support Eastern Catholics in the diaspora in their efforts to preserve their living traditions and thus, by their distinctive witness, to enrich the communities in which they live.

The Church needs you. The contribution that the Christian East can offer us today is immense! We have great need to recover the sense of mystery that remains alive in your liturgies, liturgies that engage the human person in his or her entirety, that sing of the beauty of salvation and evoke a sense of wonder at how God’s majesty embraces our human frailty! It is likewise important to rediscover, especially in the Christian West, a sense of the primacy of God, the importance of mystagogy and the values so typical of Eastern spirituality: constant intercession, penance, fasting, and weeping for one’s own sins and for those of all humanity (penthos)! It is vital, then, that you preserve your traditions without attenuating them, for the sake perhaps of practicality or convenience, lest they be corrupted by the mentality of consumerism and utilitarianism.

Your traditions of spirituality, ancient yet ever new, are medicinal. In them, the drama of human misery is combined with wonder at God’s mercy, so that our sinfulness does not lead to despair, but opens us to accepting the gracious gift of becoming creatures who are healed, divinized and raised to the heights of heaven. For this, we ought to give endless praise and thanks to the Lord. Together, we can pray with Saint Ephrem the Syrian and say to the Lord Jesus: “Glory to you, who laid your cross as a bridge over death... Glory to you who clothed yourself in the body of mortal man, and made it the source of life for all mortals” (Homily on our Lord, 9). We must ask, then, for the grace to see the certainty of Easter in every trial of life and not to lose heart, remembering, as another great Eastern Father wrote, that “the greatest sin is not to believe in the power of the Resurrection” (SAINT ISAAC OF NINEVEH, *Sermones ascetici*, I, 5).

Who, better than you, can sing a song of hope even amid the abyss of violence? Who, better than you, who have experienced the horrors of war so closely that Pope Francis referred to you as “martyr Churches” (Address to ROACO, ibid.)? From the Holy Land to Ukraine, from Lebanon to Syria, from the Middle East to Tigray and the Caucasus, how much violence do we see! Rising up from this horror, from the slaughter of so many young people, which ought to provoke outrage because lives are being sacrificed in the name of military conquest, there resounds an appeal: the appeal not so much of the Pope, but of Christ himself, who repeats: “Peace be with you!” (Jn 20:19, 21, 26). And he adds: “Peace I leave you; my peace I give to you. I do not give it to you as the world gives it” (Jn 14:27). Christ’s peace is not the sepulchral silence that reigns after conflict; it is not the fruit of oppression,

but rather a gift that is meant for all, a gift that brings new life. Let us pray for this peace, which is reconciliation, forgiveness, and the courage to turn the page and start anew.

For my part, I will make every effort so that this peace may prevail. The Holy See is always ready to help bring enemies together, face to face, to talk to one another, so that peoples everywhere may once more find hope and recover the dignity they deserve, the dignity of peace. The peoples of our world desire peace, and to their leaders I appeal with all my heart: Let us meet, let us talk, let us negotiate! War is never inevitable. Weapons can and must be silenced, for they do not resolve problems but only increase them. Those who make history are the peacemakers, not those who sow seeds of suffering. Our neighbours are not first our enemies, but our fellow human beings; not criminals to be hated, but other men and women with whom we can speak. Let us reject the Manichean notions so typical of that mindset of violence that divides the world into those who are good and those who are evil.

The Church will never tire of repeating: let weapons be silenced. I would like to thank God for all those who, in silence, prayer and self-sacrifice, are sowing seeds of peace. I thank God for those Christians – Eastern and Latin alike – who, above all in the Middle East, persevere and remain in their homelands, resisting the temptation to abandon them. Christians must be given the opportunity, and not just in words, to remain in their native lands with all the rights needed for a secure existence. Please, let us strive for this!

Thank you, dear brothers and sisters of the East, the lands where Jesus, the Sun of Justice, dawned, for being “lights in our world” (cf. Mt 5:14). Continue to be outstanding for your faith, hope, and charity, and nothing else. May your Churches be exemplary, and may your Pastors promote communion with integrity, especially in the Synods of Bishops, that they may be places of fraternity and authentic co-responsibility. Ensure transparency in the administration of goods and be signs of humble and complete dedication to the holy people of God, without regard for honors, worldly power or appearance. Saint Symeon the New Theologian used an eloquent image in this regard: “Just as one who throws dust on the flame of a burning furnace extinguishes it, so the cares of this life and every kind of attachment to petty and worthless things destroy the warmth of the heart that was initially kindled” (Practical and Theological Chapters, 63). Today more than ever, the splendor of the Christian East demands freedom from all worldly attachments and from every tendency contrary to communion, in order to remain faithful in obedience and in evangelical witness.

I thank you for this, and in cordially giving you my blessing, I ask you to pray for the Church and to raise your powerful prayers of intercession for my ministry. Thank you!