



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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The Pope receives the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East and expresses his concern for the terrible violence in Iraq and Syria.

The confirmation of existing fraternal bonds, belonging to the single Body of Christ, cooperation in charity and the common memory of evangelising activity were the key points of Pope Francis' address this morning to His Holiness Mar Gewargis III, Catholicos and Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, and his delegation. The audience was preceded by a private meeting between the Pope and the Patriarch, and afterwards the two prayed together in the Redemptoris Mater chapel.

"This meeting and the prayer that we will raise together to the Lord invoke the gift of peace", Francis began. "Indeed, we are troubled by what continues to happen in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Syria. There, hundreds of thousands of innocent children, women and men are afflicted by the terrible violence of bloody conflicts, that nothing can justify or permit. There our Christian brothers and sisters, as well as different religious and ethnic minorities, are unfortunately accustomed to suffering great hardships every day".

In the midst of so much suffering, an end to which I implore, every day we see Christians who follow the way of the cross, meekly following in the footsteps of Jesus, joining with Him, He Who with His cross reconciled us. ... These brothers and sisters are models that exhort us in every circumstance to remain with the Lord, to embrace His cross, to trust in His love. They show us that at the centre of our faith there is always the presence of Jesus, Who invites us, also in adversity, never to tire of living His message of love, reconciliation and forgiveness. This we learn from the martyrs and from the many who today, even at the cost of their life, still remain faithful to the Lord and with Him defeat evil with good. We are grateful to these brothers of ours, who impel us to follow the way of Jesus to defeat wickedness. Just as the blood of Christ, spilt out of love, reconciled and united, generating the Church, so the blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christian unity".

The Holy Father went on to highlight the strong fraternal bonds that already exist between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Catholic Church, further strengthened by the visit of the Catholicos, and previous important steps such as the visit to the Vatican by the Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV, who signed with St. John Paul II the *Common Christological Declaration* that made it possible to confess the same faith in the mystery of the Incarnation and opened up the path to full communion, or the creation of the Joint Commission for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. These steps may help us pave the way toward "that long-awaited day in which we celebrate the Sacrifice of the Lord at the same altar, as a real

sign of fully restored ecclesial communion”.

“In the meantime we have the opportunity to take brisk steps, growing in mutual knowledge and witnessing the Gospel together”, he continued. “We are called to work together in charity wherever possible, so that love may indicate the way of communion. In Baptism we rediscovered the foundation of the real communion between us. Catholics and Assyrians, ‘in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body’: we belong to the one Body of Christ. ... With this certainty let us proceed, journeying together trustfully. ... Let us never tire of asking the Lord, the divine physician, to heal the wounds of the past with the balm of His mercy”.

“It will also be good for us to renew the common memory of our evangelising activity, which is rooted in the communion of the primitive Church. From there originated the spread of the Gospel that, at the dawn of faith, reached Rome and lands of Mesopotamia, the cradle of the most ancient civilisations, giving rise to flourishing Christian communities. The great evangelisers of those times, the saints and martyrs of every time, all co-citizens in the Jerusalem of heaven, encourage us and accompany us now in opening together fruitful paths of communion and witness”, Francis concluded.
