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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE LEO XIV
TO TÜRKIYE AND LEBANON
WITH A PILGRIMAGE TO IZNIK (TÜRKIYE)
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 1700th ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST ECUMENICAL
COUNCIL OF NICAEA
(27 November - 2 December 2025)
PRAYER MEETING
WITH BISHOPS, PRIESTS, DEACONS, CONSECRATED PERSONS, AND
PASTORAL WORKERS

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Cathedral of the Holy Spirit (Istanbul)
Friday, 28 November 2025

[[Multimedia](#)]

Your Excellencies,
Dear brother priests,
Dear religious sisters and brothers, pastoral workers,
and all my brothers and sisters,

It is a great joy for me to be with you. I am grateful to the Lord that in my first Apostolic Journey he has granted me the grace to visit this "holy land" that is Türkiye, a place where the story of the people of Israel meets the birth of Christianity, where the Old and New Testaments embrace and where the pages of numerous Councils were written.

The faith that unites us has deep roots. Obedient to God's call, our father Abraham set out from Ur of the Chaldeans and then, from the region of Harran in the south of present-day Türkiye, he departed for the Promised Land (cf. *Gen* 12:1). In the fullness of time, after Jesus' death and resurrection, his disciples also came to Anatolia. In Antioch, where Saint Ignatius would later become bishop, they were called "Christians" for the first time (cf. *Acts* 11:26). From that city, Saint Paul began some of his apostolic journeys that led to the founding of many communities. It was likewise in Ephesus on the shores of the Anatolian peninsula, where, according to some ancient sources, John the Beloved Disciple and Evangelist lived and died (cf. Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 3, 4; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History*, V, 24, 3).

Furthermore, we recall with admiration the great Byzantine history, the missionary impulse of the Church of Constantinople and the spread of Christianity throughout the Levant. Even today in Türkiye there are many communities of Eastern-rite Christians — Armenians, Syrians and Chaldeans — as well as those of the Latin rite. The Ecumenical Patriarchate remains a point of reference both for its Greek faithful and for those of other Orthodox Churches.

Dear friends, your communities emerged from the richness of this long history, and it is you who are called today to nurture the seed of faith handed down to us by Abraham, the Apostles and the Fathers. The history that precedes you is not something merely to be remembered and then venerated as a glorious past while we look with resignation at how small the Catholic Church has become numerically. On the contrary, we are invited to adopt an evangelical vision, enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

When we look with God's eyes, we discover that he has chosen the way of littleness, descending into our midst. This is the way of the Lord, to which we are all called to bear witness. The prophets announce God's promise by speaking of a small shoot that will spring forth (cf. *Is* 11:1). Jesus praises the little ones who trust in him (cf. *Mk* 10:13–16). He teaches that God's kingdom does not impose itself with displays of power (cf. *Lk* 17:20–21) but grows like the smallest of all the seeds planted in the earth (cf. *Mk* 4:31).

This logic of littleness is the Church's true strength. It does not lie in her resources or structures, nor do the fruits of her mission depend on numbers, economic power or social influence. The Church instead lives by the light of the Lamb; gathered around him, she is sent out into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this mission, she is constantly called to trust in the Lord's promise: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:32). Let us remember also the words of [Pope Francis](#) who said, "A Christian community in which the faithful, priests and bishop: do not follow the path of littleness has no future... The kingdom of God sprouts in small things, always in what is small" (*Homily at Santa Marta*, 3 December 2019).

The Church in Türkiye is a small community, yet fruitful like a seed and leaven of the kingdom. I therefore encourage you to cultivate a spiritual attitude of confident hope, rooted in faith and in union with God. There is a need to witness to the Gospel with joy and look to the future with hope. Some hopeful signs are already clearly present. Let us ask the Lord, therefore, for the grace to recognize and to nurture them. There are other signs, perhaps, that we may need to express creatively through perseverance in faith and in witness.

Among the most beautiful and promising signs, I think of the many young people who come knocking at the doors of the Catholic Church with their questions and concerns. In this regard, I urge you to continue the good pastoral work that you are doing. I also encourage you to listen, to accompany young people, to give special attention to those areas where the Church in Türkiye is called to serve: ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, transmitting the faith to the local population, and pastoral service to refugees and migrants.

This last aspect deserves special reflection. The significant presence of migrants and refugees in this country presents the Church with the challenge of welcoming and serving some of the most vulnerable. At the same time, this Church itself is made up largely of foreigners, and many of you — priests, sisters and pastoral workers — come from other lands. This calls for a special commitment to inculturation so that the language, customs and culture of Türkiye become more and more your own. Moreover, the communication of the Gospel always passes through such inculturation.

I would also like to recall that it was in this land of yours that the first eight Ecumenical Councils were held. This year marks the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea, a “milestone in the history of the Church but also of humanity as a whole” (Francis, *Address to the International Theological Commission*, 28 November 2024). This ever-relevant event puts before us several challenges that I would like to mention.

The first is the importance of *grasping the essence of the faith and of being Christian*. Around the Creed, the Church at Nicaea rediscovered its unity (cf. Bull *Spes Non Confundit*, 17). The Creed is not simply a doctrinal formula; it is an invitation to seek — amid different sensibilities, spiritualities and cultures — the unity and essential core of the Christian faith centered on Christ and on the Church’s Tradition. Nicaea still asks us: Who is Jesus for us? What does it essentially mean to be Christian? The Creed, unanimously professed together, becomes a criterion for discernment, a compass, the center around which our beliefs and actions must revolve. In speaking about the connection between faith and works, I would like to thank the international organizations for their support of the Church’s charitable activities, especially for the help offered to the victims following the earthquake in 2023. Here I would single out *Caritas Internationalis* and *Kirche in Not*.

The second challenge is the urgency of *rediscovering in Christ the face of God the Father*. Nicaea affirms the divinity of Jesus and his equality with the Father. In Jesus, we find the true face of God and his definitive word about humanity and history. This truth constantly challenges our own ideas of God whenever they do not correspond to what Jesus has revealed. It invites us to ongoing discernment regarding our forms of faith, prayer, pastoral life and spirituality. But there is also another challenge, which we might call a “new Arianism,” present in today’s culture and sometimes even among believers. This occurs when Jesus is admired on a merely human level, perhaps even with religious respect, yet not truly regarded as the living and true God among us. His divinity, his lordship over history, is overshadowed, and he is reduced to a great historical figure, a wise teacher, or a prophet who fought for justice — but nothing more. Nicaea reminds us that Jesus Christ is not a figure of the past; he is the Son of God present among us, guiding history toward the future promised by God.

Finally, the third challenge is *the mediation of faith and the development of doctrine*. In a complex cultural context, the Nicene Creed expressed the essence of the faith through the philosophical and cultural categories of its time. Yet only a few decades later, at the First Council of Constantinople, we see that it was further deepened and expanded. Thanks to this doctrinal development, there emerged a new formulation, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed that we profess together in our Sunday liturgies. Here too we learn an important lesson: the Christian faith must always be expressed in the languages and categories of the culture in which we live, just as the Fathers did at Nicaea and in the other Councils. At the same time, we must distinguish the essence of the faith from the historical formulas that express it — formulas that are always partial and provisional and can change as doctrine is more deeply understood. Let us recall that the Church's newest Doctor, Saint John Henry Newman, insisted on the development of Christian doctrine, because doctrine is not an abstract, static idea, but reflects the very mystery of Christ. Therefore, its development is organic, akin to that of a living reality, gradually bringing to light and expressing more fully the essential heart of the faith.

Dear friends, before concluding, I would like to recall someone so dear to you, [Saint John XXIII](#), who loved and served the people of this land. He wrote, "I like to repeat what I feel in my heart: I love this country and its inhabitants." While looking from the window of the Jesuit house at the fishermen busy with their boats and nets on the Bosphorus, he continued: "The sight moves me. The other night, around one in the morning, it was pouring rain, yet the fishermen were there, undaunted in their hard labor... To imitate the fishermen of the Bosphorus — working day and night with their torches lit, each on his small boat, following the direction of their spiritual leaders — this is our serious and sacred duty."

I hope that you will be moved by this same passion, in order to keep alive the joy of faith, and continue to work as courageous fishermen in the Lord's boat. May Mary Most Holy, the *Theotokos*, intercede for you and keep you in her care. Thank you.



The HOLY SEE

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