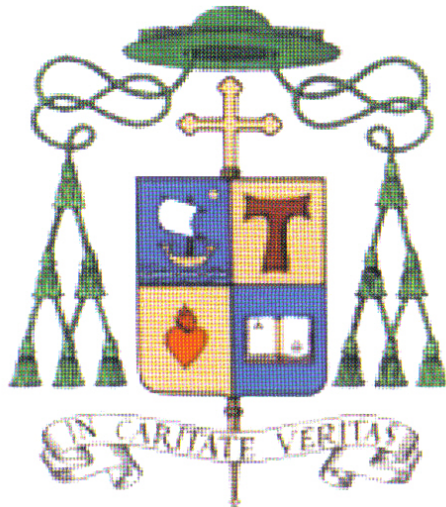


***“To Live and to Think  
as Christians  
in a Non-Christian World”***



***Pastoral letter of Monsignor Luigi Padovese  
To all the faithful of the Vicariate of Anatolia***

**Dear Brothers,**

**It is with great cordiality that I greet each one of you. Some of you I already know; others not yet. I assure you, however, that you are all present in my prayers. At my ordination as Bishop on November 7<sup>th</sup> of last year, I assumed the responsibility of keeping you always in my prayers.**

**It is customary every year for the Bishop to present a program of reflection for all his Church. As I have already informed you, the theme on which I have invited you to reflect upon is entitled: “To Live and to Think as Christians in a Non-Christian World”.**

**Among all the countries of ancient Christian tradition, none has had as many martyrs as Turkey. The land that we tread upon has been washed with the blood of many martyrs who chose to die for Christ rather than to deny him.**

**A Christian woman by the name of Seconda who lived around the year 170 AD, was asked to deny her faith in order to escape death. She replied: “I wish to be that which I am; namely, I am a Christian and wish to remain so”.**

**Dear Brothers, we may not be asked to give witness to our faith up to the point of martyrdom, but we are nevertheless, asked to give witness to it. I invite you to read the First Letter which the Apostle Peter wrote to the first communities of Turkey in order to better understand what is required in order to be a Christian. I would like, furthermore, that this text of the New Testament be the one to which we will be oriented this year.**

**We all know that in our country it is not always easy to manifest our Christian identity. We are conditioned by the environment: at times we are even afraid to say what we are because of the social consequences that could ensue. On the other hand there is the growing idea that all religions are equal. Well, it is right to remember that the Christian faith is**

**not faith in the existence of God, but faith in a new image of God revealed in the person of Jesus. Christ is the center of our faith. Christ reveals the Father who seeks us and who loves us even when we distance ourselves from him.**

**The conviction that Christians are such not for “doctrinal” motives but because of adherence to the person of Jesus was present to the same persecutors who in ancient times required the martyrs to renounce their faith cursing Christ.**

**This was the experience of the bishop Polycarp of Smyrna. As we read in the account of his martyrdom: the judge urged him saying: “Swear and I will set you free. Cursed be Christ”. He replied: “I have served Him for eighty-six years and He has never done me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King, my Savior?”**

**Dear Brothers, I mention this witness, but there are thousands of martyrs from our dear land of Turkey. They invite us to be aware of and happy in our Christian identity. Moreover, I wish to tell you that this identity which has been given us in baptism is to be nourished, augmented and guarded. An ancient Christian author wrote: “One is not born a Christian, but one becomes a Christian”.**

**Here we all live in a situation of minority in respect to our Muslim brothers. I invite you to see this situation as an occasion to become ever more aware of our faith. In other countries where there the majority is Christian, there is a greater risk of saying that one is Christian without really being so. Here we must be Christian and show that we are.**

**Our obligation is not to convert others to our faith, but to simply show how beautiful it is to be Christians. This means to speak with our lives more than with words. “Men-said an ancient sage – believe more with their eyes than with their ears”.**

**I am writing these thoughts from Rome where I represent the bishops of Turkey and where, together with the Pope and another 250 bishops we are working on the Eucharist. Since October 3<sup>rd</sup> we have been coming together every day to deepen and to enliven our participation in the Mass.**

**That which emerges continuously from our meetings is the centrality of the mystery of the body and blood of the Lord for our lives. If it is true that we begin to be Christians at Baptism, it is, however with the Eucharist that we are able to become good Christians.**

**I invite you therefore, to be more present at the Sunday celebration. Some third century martyrs of Africa witnessed with their blood to their faith in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration. “We cannot live without Sunday!”: This is how they responded to the pagan authorities who put them to death. And us, brothers?**

**Let us look at the Eucharist, therefore, not as a duty to perform, but as a gift of God giving himself to us. God has no need of us but we have need of him! Dear brothers, I offer you these few thoughts which I ask you to examine carefully.**

**Lastly, I wish to bestow on you my joy in being with you. I consider it a gift of the Lord to be for you and with you a Christian of the Church of Anatolia. Dear Brothers, I have offered you these few thoughts which we will examine carefully during this year. Finally, I ask you to uphold me with your prayers so that I for my part am able to uphold you.**

**May the Lord bless you,**

**October 2005**

**+ Luigi  
Bishop**