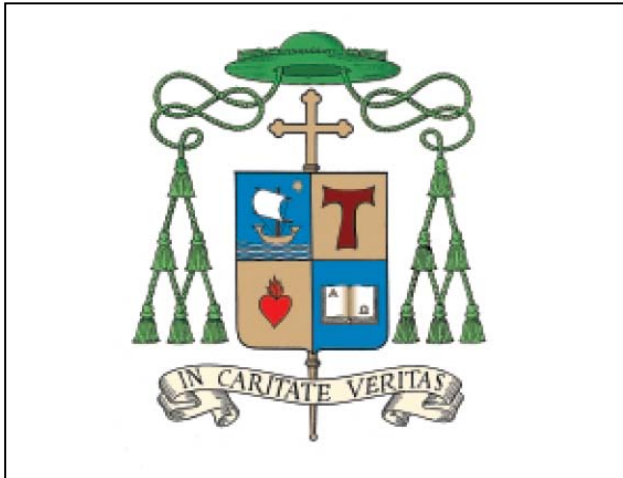


# **We are Successors of Paul and of the First Christians.**



**Pastoral Letter of Monsignor Luigi Padovese  
To All the Faithful of the Vicariate of Anatolia  
Pastoral Letter 2007 - 2008**

Dear **Sisters** and **Brothers**,

The Lord give you peace. Every day I pray that this peace be with you always. The duty of the Bishop, in fact, is not only that of guiding, instructing and supporting those under his care, but also that of praying for them. Our Church of Anatolia is numerically reduced, but now I see its needs and I know that each of us has the need for the other to pray for them.

It is almost three years since Divine Providence has sent me among you. I cannot say that they have been easy years. So many preoccupations and problems have often taken away my inner tranquility and like Peter in the midst of the sea, I asked the Lord, “Help me, I’m drowning”. In spite of it all I can say that I am happy to be with you and I thank God for the privilege of being part of the Church of Anatolia. The difficulties I have had to face were perhaps a test to see if I truly love our community.

As brother speaking to brother, allow me to recall a difficulty which at times creates A sadness in me: it is the impression that our faith is conventional, lacking in depth and expressing itself in a participation reduced to community prayer, especially on Sunday.

Many of you belong to families which have had the courage to remain Christian, notwithstanding the contrary external pressures . You know well that for the past century in our Turkey, many Christians through necessity or for convenience, but certainly not voluntarily, have renounced their faith or have hidden it. There are still hundreds of thousands of descendents of these families of former Christians and with pleasure I note that, from time to time, some one of them occasionally returns to the faith of their parents or grandparents. I say this not to judge those who have abandoned their Christian identity, but to say to all of you that **the faith transmitted** by those who have preceded us is not like an ancient

painting which we save in our homes, but is a **gift of God which is not alive without our cooperation.**

I have already written in former pastoral letters that “we are not born Christians but we become Christians” and with those words I mean to say that the grace of God is not efficacious without our cooperation. **God does not force us, but he invites us.** Jesus in the Gospel never forced anyone to follow Him, but simply made a proposal: “if you wish, come and follow me”(Mt 19,21).

To us also comes the continuous reformulated proposal which respects our freedom. Perhaps it is well to remember that **God does not need our prayer**, our observance of the law. The face of God, which is presented to us by Jesus, is not that of a tax collector or of a judge who awaits the exact fulfillment of the commandments. God is Father and when he asks us something it is not for his good, but to our advantage. When he asks us to pray, he does not do it because our prayer makes him greater. When he asks us to be kind to

others, he does not expect that we do it to receive a reward. **Jesus has taught us what ‘gratuity’** and disinterested love mean, that is a love which looks at the other rather than at oneself.

To the one who accepted to follow him, the Lord then makes this proposal: “just as I have done, you do also”. This **‘just as’** is very important, because it gives the measure of our being disciples of Jesus. Are we able to serve one another “just as” He has done? Are we ready to forgive “just as” he has pardoned? Do we love “just as” He has loved us?

Dear brothers, I present these few reflections because I think that each of us, in our communities, needs to know more deeply the reasons of his faith. **If one of our Muslim brothers asked: why are you a Christian, what would we answer?** Would it be sufficient to say: “it is the faith I inherited from my parents”? But if a faith received does not become our own, it is a poor faith. Jesus in the gospel indicates above all some ways of

entering “in the secret of one’s own room” to meet God. And that means that **only community prayer does not suffice**. Again Jesus invites us **to search for the face of God through the reading of the Gospel**. Lastly, he wishes for us to pray together for “where there are two or three united in my name, I am in their midst”.

What do we deduce from these words except that God does not want to be treated by us as a mute idol to whom we offer words and gestures, but without the participation of the heart? The Apostle John who laid his head on Jesus’ breast at the last supper, has told us that “God is love” (1Jn 4,16). Very well, if it is true that God is love, what can he expect of us if not an answer of love? And to love, one needs to be present, not only with the body, but also with the will and with the heart.

Let us examine our consciences on our manner or prayer and let us ask ourselves if, as we approach the Lord Jesus or our heavenly Father, does the duty of

accomplishing rather than the need of a meeting with Him who loves us more than we love ourselves prevail.

As you perhaps know, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on the 28 of June, has declared that from 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2008 to the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2009, the Catholic Church will celebrate the bi-millennium of the birth of the Apostle Paul.

**Paul, like all of you, is a son of this land.** Paul is one of us. Who in all of the Christian world has the privilege to say: Paul was born in my land of Anatolia? Certainly, the city of Rome has seen the earthly decline of the apostle and his bones are conserved there, but it is at Tarsus that he saw the light of day and it is at Antioch that he founded his Christian community.

I tell you these things because it is in our privilege of being of the same country of Paul, that there corresponds the duty of knowing him more and more. Paul, through his experience of Jesus, could be our guide – through his letters – to get closer to God.

This year I invite you to take in hand all his letters and read them. I, on my part, in the months to come, will send you a project of readings, because by better knowing the figure of the Apostle of the Gospel we may “know the love of Christ which surpasses every other knowledge” (Ef.3,18).

Paul who had in himself “the solicitude of the whole Church” (2Cor 11,28) **looks at this our Church of Anatolia which is his Church** and intercedes with God because we are with him, credible witnesses of the Gospel.

I bless you.

+ Luigi, Bishop