



The Holy See

***LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO HIS HOLINESS BARTHOLOMAIOS I
ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH***

*To His Holiness Bartholomaios I
Archbishop of Constantinople
Ecumenical Patriarch*

The feast of Saint Andrew the Apostle, brother of Peter and Patron of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, gives me the opportunity to convey to Your Holiness my prayerful good wishes for an abundance of spiritual gifts and divine blessings.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice (Phil 4:4).

These words of Saint Paul inspire us to share our joy on this happy occasion. The feast of Saint Andrew, like that of Saints Peter and Paul, has enabled us each year to express our common apostolic faith, our union in prayer and our joint commitment to reinforce the communion between us. A delegation from the Holy See, led by my venerable brother Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, will attend the solemn Divine Liturgy presided over by Your Holiness together with members of the Holy Synod. In my heart I vividly recall my personal participation last year in the celebration of this feast at the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and I remember with deep gratitude the warm welcome extended to me on that occasion. That encounter, the presence of my delegate this year at the Phanar, as well as the visit from a delegation of the See of Constantinople for the feast of Saints Peter and Paul in Rome, all represent authentic signs of the commitment of our Churches to an ever deeper communion, strengthened through cordial personal relations, prayer and the dialogue of charity and truth.

This year we thank God in particular for the meeting of the *Joint Commission* which took place in Ravenna, a city whose monuments speak eloquently of the ancient Byzantine heritage handed

down to us from the undivided Church of the first millennium. May the splendour of those mosaics inspire all the members of the *Joint Commission* to pursue their important task with renewed determination, in fidelity to the Gospel and to Tradition, ever alert to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in the Church today.

While the meeting in Ravenna was not without its difficulties, I pray earnestly that these may soon be clarified and resolved, so that there may be full participation in the Eleventh Plenary Session and in subsequent initiatives aimed at continuing the theological dialogue in mutual charity and understanding. Indeed, our work towards unity is according to the will of Christ our Lord. In these early years of the third millennium, our efforts are all the more urgent because of the many challenges facing all Christians, to which we need to respond with a united voice and with conviction.

I therefore wish to assure you once more of the Catholic Church commitment to nurture fraternal ecclesial relations and to persevere in our theological dialogue, in order to draw closer to full communion, as stated in our [Common Declaration](#) issued last year at the conclusion of my visit to Your Holiness.

Once again we take our inspiration from Saint Paul words to the Christians of Philippi, with which he urges them to seek perfection through the imitation of Christ, and reminds them to hold fast to what we have attained (*Phil 3:16*).

With these sentiments of fraternal affection in the Lord, I embrace Your Holiness and all the members of the Holy Synod. I greet also the Orthodox faithful, praying that the peace and the grace of the Lord may be with you all.

From the Vatican, 23 November 2007

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