



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO A DELEGATION
OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE**

Friday, 29 June 2007

Dear Brothers in Christ,

With great joy and sincere esteem I welcome and greet you with the words that St Paul addressed to the Christians of Ephesus: "*Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Eph 6: 23). It is a greeting of peace, love and faith.

Welcome among us, dear Brothers, for the Feast of the Patrons of this City of ours, St Peter and St Paul! With their martyrdom they witnessed to faith in Christ the Saviour and love for God the Father. Your appreciated and significant presence makes our Feast all the more joyful, for it is beautiful to give glory together to God who fills us with his Grace.

The memory of the warm welcome I received at the Phanar for the Feast of St Andrew, during my Apostolic Visit to Turkey last November, is still vividly impressed in my mind and in my heart, and even more vivid is my unforgettable meeting with His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew I, the Holy Synod and the faithful. I am still profoundly moved and grateful for it all.

The embrace of peace we exchanged during the Divine Liturgy remains a seal and a commitment for our lives as Pastors of the Church, since we are all convinced that reciprocal love is a prerequisite for achieving that full unity in faith and in ecclesial life towards which we have set out with trust.

This is truly the aim of our common initiatives: to intensify the sentiments and relations of love between our Churches and between the individual members of the faithful in such a way as to overcome those prejudices and misunderstandings that derive from centuries of separation in order to face, in truth but with a fraternal spirit, the difficulties that still prevent us from approaching

the same Eucharistic table.

In this regard, prayer has an indispensable role because the Lord alone can direct and guide our steps, since unity is first and foremost a gift of God to be implored in unison and to be welcomed with humble docility, aware of the sacrifices which the journey of *rapprochement* to unity entails. The present impossibility of concelebrating the Lord's one Eucharist is a sign that full communion does not yet exist; we wish to try to overcome this situation with determination and loyalty.

We are therefore delighted that the theological dialogue has been resumed with renewed spirit and vigour. The competent Joint International Commission will be meeting next autumn to continue to study such a central and crucial issue as the ecclesiological and canonical consequences of the sacramental structure of the Church, and in particular, collegiality and authority in the Church.

We all desire to accompany its work with persevering prayer. May the Lord enlighten the Catholic and Orthodox members so that they may propose, on the basis of Sacred Scripture and of the Tradition of the Church, solutions that can lead us to make important steps towards full communion.

I am very pleased to hear that the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Patriarch Bartholomew I himself are following the work of this Commission with similar sentiments.

The search for full unity cannot be limited to fraternal relations between Pastors and the work of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue, however demanding it may be; the experience of history and the present situation teach us that the involvement of the entire Body of our Churches is necessary, in different forms. On this spiritual journey a privileged role is played by the theological faculties and institutes for research and teaching.

This was previously pointed out by the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council when it clearly emphasized: "Sacred theology and other branches of knowledge, especially those of a historical nature, must be taught with due regard for the ecumenical point of view, so that they may correspond as exactly as possible with the facts".

The Conciliar Document consequently drew the conclusion that: "It is important that future Pastors and priests should have mastered a theology that has been carefully elaborated in this way" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 10).

In this perspective how important personal and cultural contacts among young students are! Their exchanges at the level of post-university specialization is a fruitful area, as past experiences of the Catholic Committee for Cultural Collaboration show.

Catechetical formation of the new generations should also be fostered, so that they are fully aware

of their own ecclesial identity and the bonds of communion that exist with the other brethren in Christ, without forgetting the problems and obstacles that still hinder full communion between us.

Dear Brothers in Christ, your presence with us for the Feast of Sts Peter and Paul testifies to the desire for this common search, a desire which has also been brought into the limelight by other encounters and events promoted by Catholics and Orthodox at a local level.

Furthermore, your visit this year coincides with the announcement I have made of an important initiative of the Catholic Church, the Pauline Year, that is, a Jubilee Year dedicated to the memory of St Paul on the 2,000th anniversary of his birth. I am sure that this will constitute another particularly appropriate opportunity for promoting moments of prayer, study meetings and fraternal gestures between Catholics and Orthodox.

May St Paul, a great evangelizer and tireless builder of unity, help us to be docile to the voice of the Spirit and obtain for us that missionary zeal which set his whole life on fire.

With these sentiments, I once again thank each one of you for your visit, and as I renew the expression of my affection and esteem to His Holiness Bartholomew I, I express the hope that we may intensify together every possible effort on the way towards full communion; and to this end I invoke upon our Churches an abundance of Blessings from Our Lord Jesus Christ.

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