



The Holy See

LETTER OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO HIS HOLINESS BARTHOLOMEW I

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Archbishop of Constantinople Ecumenical Patriarch

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pt 1:3).

This blessing, which opens the First Letter of St Peter to the Christians of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, expresses the sentiments which unite me with Your Holiness and the Ecumenical Patriarchate to celebrate the feast of the Apostle Andrew, Peter’s brother.

The message of salvation brought by Jesus Christ was passed down to us by the Apostles, guarantors of its continuity and authenticity. Thus we are closely linked to the work of Christ who founded the common, living hope which dwells in us and which we have the duty of sharing with all, according to the mandate of the risen Lord.

The Church of Rome, which celebrates St Andrew on the same day as the Church of Constantinople, will take part in the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s celebration through a delegation headed by my venerable Brother, Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. I remember with joy the celebration in which I myself had the grace to take part in the past. This exchange of visits for the feast of our patron saints has already become an ever fruitful opportunity for prayer, for dialogue, for working out common projects and for implementing initiatives to proclaim to the world that salvation comes from the Lord, and that we are committed to seeking ways leading to full communion.

On 30 November, St Andrew’s feast day, the preparation for the Great Jubilee will begin in Rome with the celebration of Vespers. We are thus progressing towards the Year 2000 to commemorate the Incarnation of our Lord and Saviour, with joy and the deepest gratitude. This event, in fact, involves all who believe in Jesus Christ.

In my Letter *[Tertio millennio adveniente](#)* on the preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, I expressed the hope that we

might present ourselves “if not completely united, at least much closer to overcoming the divisions of the second millennium”. And I wrote that “it is essential not only to continue along the path of dialogue on doctrinal matters, but above all to be more committed to prayer for Christian unity” (n. 34), in order to succeed. By this double commitment, we can advance towards resolving the difficulties existing between Catholics and Orthodox.

The dialogue we have so far undertaken is a way we have been offered to affirm together, before the whole world and in the eyes of all Christians, our willingness to make *a great effort to reestablish our full communion, the source of such good for the Church of Christ* (cf. *Ut unum sint*, n. 56). This dialogue, “slow and arduous, yet a source of great joy” (*ibid.*, n. 51), has borne fruit. They can seem unexpected because there is a long way to go. We must accustom ourselves to responding ever more deeply to the Apostle’s exhortation: “bear one another’s burdens”. And today, on the threshold of the third millennium of our history, we long to ensure that Christian communities, in their faith and ardent desire for the salvation of humanity, will be ever more open to the call of the Spirit, who directs all Christians to full and visible unity (cf. *ibid.*, n. 99). Because of the very nature of the communion that already exists between us, we must pray more intensely and persevere in our quest.

By their intercession the brother saints, Andrew and Peter, will help Catholics and Orthodox to be more attentive and more obedient to the Word of the Lord who calls for full communion.

From the Vatican, 26 November 1996.

JOHN PAUL II

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