



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO A DELEGATION OF THE ECUMENICAL
PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE
ON THE SOLEMNITY OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL**

Saturday, 28 June 2003

*Dear Brothers in Christ,*1. I joyfully welcome you to the Vatican for this annual meeting on the occasion of the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul. Your presence here, as representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarch, His Holiness Bartholomaios I, is a sign of our common love for Christ and an act of ecclesial fraternity, by which we reaffirm the legacy of love and unity which the Lord left to his Church, built on the Apostles. These yearly meetings nurture our fraternal relationship and they sustain our hope as we proceed step by step along the way to full communion and the overcoming of our historical divisions.2. I give thanks to the Lord that, in the year that has passed, the Holy See has had many occasions for meeting and cooperation with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Among these I would recall the message which I sent to His Holiness Bartholomaios I for the Fifth Symposium on the Environment, which set out from my native land of Poland. I am most appreciative of the kind words and the prayerful good wishes which His Holiness recently offered at two conferences marking the approaching twenty-fifth anniversary of my Pontificate. Finally, I am deeply grateful for the Ecumenical Patriarchate's efforts in these past months to coordinate the continuance of the work of the International Mixed Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches. I ask you to assure His Holiness of my fervent prayers that this initiative, which is indispensable for our growth in unity, will be crowned with success. The rapid changes taking place in today's world call for all Christians to show how the Gospel of Jesus Christ can shed light on the critical ethical issues facing the human family, including the urgent need to promote interreligious dialogue, to work for an end to the injustice which creates conflict and enmity between peoples, to safeguard God's creation and to meet the challenges posed by new advances in science and technology. Here in Europe, the Lord's followers especially need to cooperate in acknowledging and giving new life to the spiritual roots at the heart of this continent's history and culture. The consolidation of European unity and identity demands that Christians, as witnesses to the saving mercy of the Triune God, play a specific role in the present process of integration and reconciliation. Is not the Church of Christ called first and foremost to offer the world a model of harmony, mutual forbearance and fruitful charity which reveals the power of God's grace to overcome all human division and discord?3. Dear Brothers, as we seek to advance in the dialogue of truth and the dialogue of charity, let us not be discouraged by the difficulties we encounter. There is always a way forward if we are committed to fulfilling the Lord's will for the unity of his disciples. We must continue our efforts, reinforce our desire for unity, and overlook no opportunity to grow towards full

communion and cooperation, all the time bringing before God in prayer our needs, our hopes and our failings, that he may heal us through his great mercy. I entrust these sentiments to you as I ask you to convey my fraternal greetings to His Holiness Bartholomaios I and to the Holy Synod. May the Lord grant us the strength to bear faithful witness to him, and to pray and work without ceasing for the unity and peace of his holy Church.

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