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In greetings to pilgrims and faithful, the Pope recalls Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

At the end of his catechesis the Pope greeted, as usual, the pilgrims and faithful from different countries present in the Paul VI Hall. Many of his comments were dedicated to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity which begins today, as he first mentioned to French-speaking pilgrims. "Our hope of unity is expressed through our prayer, and it is a hope that does not disappoint. I invite you to pray for this intention".

He went on to greet English- and Spanish-speaking pilgrims, urging them to "pray assiduously to the Father for the unity of all Christians".

He welcomed German speakers, and, at the beginning of the Prayer Week for Christian Unity, gave "a warm welcome to the delegation from the European Ecumenical Itinerary, led by the president, Annette Kurschus. Dear brothers and sisters, your stay in Rome is an important ecumenical sign that expresses the communion achieved between us through the dialogue of the last decades. Christ's Gospel is at the centre of our life, and unites people who speak different languages, live in different countries and live faith in different communities".

"I remember with emotion the ecumenical prayer in Lund, Sweden last 31 October. In the spirit of that joint commemoration of the Reformation, we look more to what unites us rather than what divides us, and continue to journey together in order to deepen our communion and to give it an ever more visible form".

"In Europe this common faith in Christ is like a green thread of hope: we belong to each other. Communion, reconciliation and unity are possible. As Christians, we have the responsibility of this message and must bear witness to it with our life. May God bless this will to union and protect all those who walk the path of unity".

He reminded Portuguese speakers, especially the young people of the "Brazilian Tropical Violins" group, that the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity offers "another reason to appeal to our communities for prayers and hope. The ecumenical movement is bearing fruit, with God's grace. May the heavenly Father continue to pour His blessings on all His children. Dearest brothers and sisters, serve the cause of unity and peace".

A cordial welcome went to Arabic-speaking faithful, especially those from the Middle East. "Dear brothers and sisters", the Holy Father exclaimed, "prayer is the key that opens God's merciful heart! It is the Church's greatest

strength, which we must never leave. Be steadfast and harmonious in prayer, like the Virgin and the Apostles".

The Pope reminded Polish pilgrims that "the motto of this Week of Prayer is a challenge to us: Christ's love drives us towards reconciliation. Let us pray to the Lord that all Christian communities, knowing better their own stories, theology and law, be increasingly open to reconciliation. Let us be pervaded by the Spirit of benevolence and understanding, as well as the wish to collaborate. To those of you present, and to those who join through prayer, I impart my heartfelt blessing".

"I greet pilgrims from Croatia", he continued. "It is with particular joy that I welcome the children and young people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with the host families in Sicily. Dear children, spending time like brothers and sisters in the families that host you, you have the opportunity to grow in a climate of hope. Only in this way, young Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims, will you safeguard hope to live in a more fraternal, just and peaceful world, more sincere and more human. Remain steadfast in your faith and pray for peace and the unity of your country and the entire world. I sincerely thank the host families for their example of love and Christian solidarity: orphans must always be defended, protected and welcomed with love. I assure you of my spiritual closeness and impart to all of you my heartfelt apostolic blessing".

He went on to address the Italians present, greeting the pilgrimage of the Augustinian Sisters, Handmaids of Jesus and Mary, the Augustinian religious and the Association of Catholic Notaries, accompanied by Archbishop Domenico Sorrentino of Assisi. "I express to you all my hope that your visit to the eternal city will inspire every one of you to explore the Word of God to recognise Jesus as the Saviour".

Finally, he greeted the young, the sick and newly-weds. "Today the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins, and this year it makes us reflect on Christ's love, which leads us to reconciliation. Dear young people, pray that all Christians become a single family again; dear sick people, offer your sufferings for the cause of the unity of the Church; and you, dear newly-weds, experience freely-given love like that of God for humanity".
