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Message of the Holy Father Francis to His Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch, for the Feast of Saint Andrew

At part of the traditional exchange of delegations for the respective feasts of the patron saints – on 29 in Rome for the celebration of Saints Peter and Paul, and on 30 November in Istanbul for the celebration of Saint Andrew – Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity leads the Holy See delegation for the feast of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The cardinal is accompanied by Bishop Brian Farrell, secretary of the dicastery, and Msgr. Andrea Palmieri, under-secretary. In Istanbul the delegation was joined by the apostolic nuncio to Turkey, Archbishop Paul F. Russell. The Holy See delegation took part in the solemn divine liturgy presided at by His Holiness Bartholomew in the patriarchal church of Saint George in the Phanar, met with the Patriarch and conversed with the Synodal commission responsible for relations with the Catholic Church.

Cardinal Koch delivered to the Ecumenical Patriarch a Message written by the Holy Father, which was read out publicly at the end of the divine liturgy.

The following is the full text of the Message:

Message of the Holy Father

To His Holiness Bartholomew
Archbishop of Constantinople
Ecumenical Patriarch

Though away from Rome on my Pastoral Visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh, I wish to extend my fraternal best wishes to Your Holiness and to the members of the Holy Synod, the clergy, the monks, and all the faithful gathered for the Divine Liturgy in the Patriarchal Church of Saint George for the liturgical commemoration of Saint Andrew the Apostle, brother of Simon Peter and first-called of the Apostles, the patron saint of the Church of Constantinople and of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. When the deacon invites those gathered during the Divine Liturgy to pray “for those who travel by land, sea, and air”, I ask you, please, to pray also for me.

The Delegation I have sent is a sign of my spiritual solidarity with your prayer of thanksgiving and praise for all that our Almighty and Merciful God has accomplished through the witness of the Apostle Andrew. In like manner, the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate welcomed in Rome last June demonstrated its spiritual closeness to us as we celebrated the wonderful deeds that God, the source of all good, accomplished through the Apostles Peter and Paul, patron saints of the Church of Rome.

The Apostles proclaimed to the ends of the earth, through their words and the sacrifice of their lives, what they themselves had seen, heard and experienced - the Word of Life, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died and rose for our salvation. Making our own this proclamation enables us to enter into communion with the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, which is the very foundation of the communion that already unites those baptized in the name of the Most Holy Trinity (cf. *1Jn* 1:1-3). Catholics and Orthodox, by professing together the dogmas of the first seven Ecumenical Councils, by believing in the efficacy of the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and by preserving the apostolic succession of the ministry of bishops, experience already a profound closeness with one another (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15). Today, in thanksgiving to the God of love, in obedience to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ and in fidelity to the teaching of the Apostles, we recognize how urgent it is to grow towards full and visible communion.

It is a source of joy to learn that on the eve of the feast of Saint Andrew, during a meeting attended by Your Holiness, the fiftieth anniversary of the visit of Pope Paul VI to the Phanar on 25 July 1967 was commemorated. That historic moment of communion between the Pastors of the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople brings to mind the words of Patriarch Athenagoras in welcoming Pope Paul VI to the Patriarchal Church of Saint George, where you are gathered today. I believe that these words can continue to inspire the dialogue between our Churches: "Let us join together what was divided, wherever this is possible, by deeds in which both Churches are involved, giving added strength to the matters of faith and canonical discipline which we have in common. Let us conduct the theological dialogue according to the principle [of] full community in the fundamentals of the faith, liberty both in theological thought, where this is pious and edifying and inspired by the main body of the Fathers, and in variety of local customs, as was favoured by the Church from the beginning" (*Tomos Agapis*, Vatican-Phanar (1958-1970), pp. 382-383).

I offer my heartfelt gratitude to Your Holiness for the generous and warm hospitality extended by the Metropolis of Leros of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, under the pastoral care of His Eminence Paisios, to the members of the Coordinating Committee of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. I wish to encourage anew this theological dialogue. The consensus reached by Catholics and Orthodox on certain fundamental theological principles regulating the relationship between primacy and synodality in the life of the Church in the first millennium can serve to evaluate, even critically, some theological categories and practices which evolved during the second millennium in conformity with those principles. Such consensus may enable us to envisage a common way of understanding the exercise of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, in the context of synodality and at the service of the communion of the Church in the present context. This sensitive task needs to be pursued in an atmosphere of mutual openness and, above all, in obedience to the demands that the Holy Spirit makes of the Church.

Your Holiness, beloved brother in Christ, in recent months I have followed with great interest your participation in significant international events held throughout the world regarding the care of creation, peaceful coexistence among peoples of different cultures and religious traditions, and the presence of Christians in the Middle East. Your Holiness's commitment is a source of inspiration, support and encouragement for me personally for, as you well know, we share these same concerns. It is my fervent hope that Catholics and Orthodox may promote joint initiatives at the local level with regard to these issues, for there are many contexts in which Orthodox and Catholics can already work together without waiting for the day of full and visible communion.

With the assurance of my continued remembrance in prayer, it is with sentiments of warm affection that I exchange with Your Holiness a fraternal embrace of peace.
