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MESSAGGIO DEL PATRIARCA ALESSIO II AL SANTO PADRE IN OCCASIONE DEL RITORNO IN RUSSIA DELL'ICONA DELLA MADRE DI DIO DI KAZAN'

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Pubblichiamo di seguito - nella traduzione ufficiale inglese - il Messaggio che S.S. Alessio II, Patriarca di Mosca e di tutte le Russie, ha inviato a Giovanni Paolo II - tramite l'Em.mo Card. Walter Kasper, Capo della Delegazione della Santa Sede - per il ritorno in Russia dell'Icona della Madre di Dio di Kazan':

• MESSAGGIO DEL PATRIARCA ALESSIO II

Your Holiness,

I wholeheartedly thank you for having handed the Kazan Icon of our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary over to the Russian Orthodox Church. On August 28, 2004, the Feast of the most glorious Dormition or the Theotokos, the representative delegation of the Roman Catholic Church led by Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, presented us with this icon after a solemn divine service at the Cathedral of the Dormition in the Moscow Kremlin, which was overcrowded with the faithful who came on this sacred day to lift up their prayers to the Most Holy Theotokos.

The transfer of this holy icon brought over by your envoys is seen by the Plenitude of the Russian Orthodox Church as both an act of the restoration of justice and an act of good will on the part of Your Holiness. I believe that your decision to hand over the icon points to the sincere desire to overcome the difficulties existing in relations between our two Churches. May this event become our common contribution to the overcoming of negative consequences of the 20th century history marked with persecution against the faith of Christ unprecedented in scale.

The veneration of the Mother of God as "the zealous intercessor for the Christian race" (Akathistos to the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God) -the veneration common to the Orthodox and Catholic Churches -brings us back to the times of the Early Church when there were no divisions between East and West so visible, regretfully, in our days. The Russian Orthodox Church, always, even in the most difficult moments in her relations with the Roman

Catholic Church, has invariably stated her willingness to develop these relations in the spirit of sincere cooperation. We see in the transfer of the Kazan Icon a step in the right direction in the belief that in the future everything that is possible will be done to settle certain problems standing between our Churches.

Good relations between the Russian Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches, which "the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Is 9:6) calls us to realize not in words but in deeds, are extremely important for the future of Europe and the whole world. The preaching of Christian values to the secularized society will be successful only if all Christians fulfil the Saviour's commandment of love: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34). Openness in relations among Christians of various confessions presupposes respect for one another, knowledge of their common history and sensitivity in carrying out any actions in territories where other Christian tradition has existed for centuries.

Once again, I would like to thank Your Holiness from my heart for the gift and to express hope that the Most Holy Theotokos as "a swift and selfless healer of infirmities and divisions" (Akathistos to the Kazan Icon of the Theotokos) will send Her grace and mercy upon the faithful of our two Churches.

With love in the Lord,

+ Alexy
Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

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