



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS FRANCIS
TO CYPRUS AND GREECE
(2-6 DECEMBER 2021)

**MEETING OF HIS BEATITUDE HIERONYMOS II AND HIS HOLINESS FRANCIS WITH THE
RESPECTIVE ENTOURAGES**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

“Throne Room” of the Orthodox Archbishopric of Greece in Athens
Saturday, 4 December 2021

[Multimedia]

Your Beatitude,

“Grace to you and peace from God” (*Rom 1:7*). I greet you with these words of the great Apostle Paul, the very words he addressed to the faithful of Rome while sojourning in Greece. Our meeting today renews that grace and peace. As I prayed before the great shrines of the Church of Rome, the tombs of the Apostles and martyrs, I felt compelled to come here as a pilgrim, with great respect and humility, in order to renew that apostolic communion and to foster fraternal charity. I thank Your Beatitude for your kind words, which I reciprocate with affection. Through you, I also greet the clergy, monastic communities and all the Orthodox faithful of Greece.

Five years ago, we met at Lesvos, amid one of the great tragedies of our time: the plight of so many of our migrant brothers and sisters, who cannot be regarded with indifference, seen only as a burdensome problem to be managed or, worse yet, passed on to someone else. Now we meet again, to share the joy of fraternity and to view the Mediterranean that surrounds us not simply as a site of difficulties and divisions, but also as a sea that brings peoples together. A short time ago, I mentioned the age-old olive trees that our lands have in common. Reflecting on those trees that

unite us, I think of the roots we share. Underground, hidden, frequently overlooked, those roots are nonetheless there and they sustain everything. What are our common roots that have endured over the centuries? They are the apostolic roots. Saint Paul speaks of them when he stresses the importance of being “built upon the foundation of the apostles” (*Eph 2:20*). Those roots, growing from the seed of the Gospel, began to bear abundant fruit precisely in Hellenic culture: I think of the early Fathers of the Church and the first great ecumenical councils.

Tragically, in later times we grew apart. Worldly concerns poisoned us, weeds of suspicion increased our distance and we ceased to nurture communion. Saint Basil the Great says that true disciples of Christ are “modeled only on what they see in him” (*Moralia*, 80, 1). Shamefully – I acknowledge this for the Catholic Church – actions and decisions that had little or nothing to do with Jesus and the Gospel, but were instead marked by a thirst for advantage and power, gravely weakened our communion. In this way, we let fruitfulness be compromised by division. History makes its weight felt, and here, today, I feel the need to ask anew for the forgiveness of God and of our brothers and sisters for the mistakes committed by many Catholics. Yet we are comforted by the certainty that our roots are apostolic and that, notwithstanding the twists and turns of time, what God planted continues to grow and bear fruit in the same Spirit. It is a grace to recognize one another’s good fruits and to join in thanking the Lord for this.

The ultimate fruit of the olive is oil. Olive oil was once kept in the precious vases and artifacts that abound among the archeological treasures of this land. Oil provided the light that illuminated the nights of antiquity. For millennia, it was the “liquid sun, the first mysterious state of the flame of lamps” (C. BOUREUX, *Les plantes de la Bible et leur symbolique*, Paris 2014, 65). For us, dear Brother, oil calls to mind the Holy Spirit who gave birth to the Church. Only he, with his unfading splendour, can dispel the darkness and illumine the steps of our journey.

This is so, because the Holy Spirit is above all the *oil of communion*. Scripture speaks of oil that makes people’s faces radiant (cf. *Ps 104:15*). How much we need to recognize in our own day, at every level, the unique worth shining forth from every man and woman, from every brother and sister! To recognize this our shared humanity is the point of departure for building communion. Sadly, though, “communion seems to strike a sensitive chord”, not only in society, but often also among the disciples of Jesus “in a Christian world fueled by individualism and institutional rigidity”. Yet if our distinctive traditions and features, our “otherness” is not – as a great theologian has said – “somehow balanced by communion, only with difficulty can it give life to a satisfactory culture” (J. ZIZIOULAS, *Comunione e alterità*, Rome 2016, 16).

Fraternal communion brings God’s blessing. In the Psalms, it is compared to “precious oil upon the head, running down upon the beard” (*Ps 133:2*). Indeed, the Spirit poured into our hearts impels us to seek ever greater fraternity, *to structure ourselves in communion*. So let us fearlessly help one another to worship God and to serve our neighbour, without proselytism and in full respect for the freedom of others, for as Saint Paul wrote, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is

freedom” (2 Cor 3:17). I pray that the Spirit of love will overcome every form of resistance and make us builders of communion. Indeed, “if love truly casts out fear and fear is transformed into love, then we will discover that what saves is unity” (SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Homily 15 on the Song of Songs*). On the other hand, how can we testify before the world to the harmony of the Gospel, if we Christians remain separated? How can we proclaim the love of Christ who gathers the nations, if we ourselves are not united? Many steps have already been taken to bring us together. Let us implore the Spirit of communion to spur us to follow his lead and to help us base communion not on calculations, strategies and expedience, but on the one model to which we must look: the Most Holy Trinity.

The Spirit is also the *oil of wisdom*. He anointed Christ and he desires to inspire Christians. In docility to his gentle wisdom, we grow in the knowledge of God and open our hearts to others. Here, I would like to express my appreciation for the importance that this Orthodox Church, heir to the first significant inculturation of the faith, with Hellenic culture, devotes to theological training and preparation. I would also point to the fruitful cooperation in the area of culture between the *Apostoliki Diakonia* of the Church of Greece – whose representatives I was pleased to meet in 2019 – and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, as well as the importance of the inter-Christian symposia sponsored jointly by the Orthodox Faculty of Theology of the University of Salonica and the Pontifical University *Antonianum* in Rome. These occasions have made it possible to establish cordial relations and to engage in beneficial exchanges between scholars of our confessions. I also appreciate the active participation of the Orthodox Church of Greece in the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue. May the Spirit help us to persevere in wisdom along these paths!

Finally, the same Spirit is the *oil of consolation*, the Paraclete who is ever at our side, balm for the soul and healing for our wounds. By his anointing he consecrated Christ, so that he could preach good news to the poor, release to captives and liberty to the oppressed (cf. *Lk 4:18*). Even now, the Spirit urges us to care for the weak and poor and to bring their cause, paramount in the eyes of God, to the world’s attention. Here, as elsewhere, the support given to those most in need during the most difficult moments of the economic crisis has been essential. Together may we develop forms of cooperation in charity, may we open our hearts and cooperate in addressing ethical and social issues, in order to serve the men and women of our time and to bring them the consolation of the Gospel. Indeed, the Spirit is calling us, now more so than in the past, to heal the wounds of mankind with the oil of love.

In Gethsemane, in his hour of anguish, Christ asked his disciples for the comfort of their closeness and prayer. The image of oil thus leads us to the Garden of Olives. “Remain here and watch” (*Mk 14:34*), Jesus said. His request to the Apostles was in the plural. Nowadays, too, he wants us to watch and pray. We need prayer for one another in order to bring to the world God’s consolation and to heal our wounded relationships. This is essential if we are to achieve “the necessary purification of past memories. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Lord’s disciples, inspired by

love, by the power of the truth and by a sincere desire for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation, are called to re-examine together their painful past and the hurt which that past regrettably continues to provoke even today” (SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 2).

We are impelled to do this especially by our faith in the resurrection. The Apostles, fearful and hesitant, were reconciled with the bitter disappointment of the Passion once they saw the risen Lord appear before them. In his wounds, apparently impossible to heal, they found new hope, unprecedented mercy, a love greater than their mistakes and failures; this turned them into one Body, united by the Spirit in the multiplicity of its many different members. May the Spirit of the crucified and risen Lord come upon us and grant us “a calm, clear-sighted and truthful vision of things enlivened by divine mercy and capable of freeing people’s minds and inspiring in everyone a renewed willingness” (ibid.). May he help us not to remain paralyzed by the negative experiences and prejudices of the past, but instead to view reality with new eyes. In this way, past trials will leave room for present consolations, and we will be comforted by the treasures of grace that we will rediscover in our brothers and sisters. The Catholic Church has just set out on a path aimed at deepening synodality and we feel we have much to learn from you. This is what we sincerely desire, certain that when brothers and sisters in the faith draw closer, the consolation of the Spirit comes down to fill our hearts.

Your Beatitude, dear brother, may the many illustrious saints of these lands, together with the martyrs who, sad to say, are more numerous in today’s world than in the past, accompany us on this journey. Despite their different confessions here below, they now dwell together in heaven. May they intercede for us, so that the Spirit, the holy oil of God, may be poured out on us in a new Pentecost, even as he was on the Apostles from whom we descend. May he kindle in our hearts the desire for communion, enlighten us with his wisdom and anoint us with his consolation.