HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE
BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO
SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 170428g

Friday 28.04.2017

Apostolic Trip of the Holy Father Francis to Egypt (28-29 April 2017) – Courtesy visit to His Holiness Pope Tawadros II

Courtesy visit to His Holiness Pope Tawadros II

At 18.20 this evening, the Holy Father Francis paid a courtesy visit to His Holiness Pope Tawadros II.

Upon arrival at the Coptic-Orthodox Patriarchate of Cairo, the Pope was welcomed by His Holiness Pope Tawadros II. After the presentation of the respective delegations, the Holy Father Francis was accompanied by Pope Tawadros II to his office where their private meeting took place.

They subsequently transferred to the adjacent Hall, where the delegations were gathered.

Then, following His Holiness Pope Tawadros II's adddress, the Holy Father Francis pronounced a discourse.

Immediately afterwards, the Holy Father Francis and His Holiness Tawadros II signed a Common Declaration. The exchange of gifts and the presentation of a gift to the delegations then took place. The Holy Father Francis and His Holiness Pope Tawadros II proceeded on foot to the nearby Church of St. Peter "Al-Boutrosiyya", for a moment of ecumenical prayer in the presence of the Leaders of other Christian confessions.

In the Church, after the reading of the prayers of Pope Francis and Pope Tawadros II, there was an exchange of signs of peace and the recital of the Lord's Prayer. A wreath of flowers was then laid, and a candle was lit.

Upon leaving the Church, in the atrium, Pope Francis paid homage to the place that commemorates the victims of the attack on 11 December 2016, which caused many deaths and injuries among the faithful gathered there.

The Holy Father then transferred by car to the Apostolic Nunciature. Upon arrival he was welcomed by a group of children from the Combonian School of Cairo. After a private dinner, he blessed a group of approximately three hundred young pilgrims from the north and south of the country, gathered in the square at the entrance of the Apostolic Nunciature.

The following is the discourse of the Holy Father Francis and his subsequent prayer.

Discourse of the Holy Father

The Lord is risen, he is truly risen! [*Al Massih kam, bilhakika kam!*]

Your Holiness,

Dear Brother,

Only a short time has passed since the great Solemnity of Easter, the heart of the Christian life, which we were blessed this year to celebrate on the same day. We thus joined in proclaiming the Easter message and, in a sense, relived the experience of the first disciples who together "rejoiced when they saw the Lord" that day (*Jn* 20:20). This paschal joy is today made all the more precious by the gift of our joining to worship the Risen One in prayer and by our renewed exchange, in his name, of the holy kiss and embrace of peace. For this, I am deeply grateful: in coming here as a pilgrim, I was sure of receiving the blessing of a brother who awaited me. I have eagerly looked forward to this new meeting, for I vividly recall the visit Your Holiness made to Rome shortly after my election, on 10 May 2013. That date has happily become the occasion for celebrating an annual *Day of Friendship between Copts and Catholics*.

As we joyfully progress on our ecumenical journey, I wish particularly to recall that milestone in relations between the Sees of Peter and Mark which is the *Common Declaration* signed by our predecessors more than forty years ago, on 10 May 1973. After "centuries of difficult history" marked by increasing "theological differences, nourished and widened by non-theological factors", and growing mistrust, we were able that day, with God's help, to acknowledge together that Christ is "perfect God with respect to his divinity and perfect man with respect to his humanity" (*Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III*, 10 May 1973). Yet equally important and timely are the words that immediately precede this statement, in which we acknowledge Jesus Christ as "our Lord and God and Saviour and King". With these words, the See of Mark and the See of Peter proclaimed the lordship of Jesus: together we confessed that we belong to Jesus and that he is *our all*.

What is more, we realized that, because we belong to him, we can no longer think that each can go his own way, for that would betray his will that his disciples "all be one… so that the world may believe" (*Jn* 17:21). In the sight of God, who wishes us to be "perfectly one" (v. 23), it is no longer possible to take refuge behind the pretext of differing interpretations, much less of those centuries of history and traditions that estranged us one from the other. In the words of His Holiness John Paul II, "there is no time to lose in this regard! Our communion in the one Lord Jesus Christ, in the one Holy Spirit and in one baptism already represents a deep and fundamental reality" (*Address at the Ecumenical Meeting*, 25 February 2000). Consequently, not only is there an ecumenism of gestures, words and commitment, but *an already effective communion* that grows daily in living relation with the Lord Jesus, is rooted in the faith we profess and is truly grounded on our baptism and our being made a "new creation" (cf. *2 Cor* 5:17) in him. In a word, there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (*Eph* 4:5). Hence, we constantly set out anew, in order to hasten that eagerly awaited day when we will be in full and visible communion around the altar of the Lord.

In this exciting journey, which – like life itself – is not always easy and straightforward, but on which the Lord exhorts us to persevere, we are not alone. We are accompanied by a great host of saints and martyrs who, already fully one, impel us here below to be a living image of the "Jerusalem above" (*Gal* 4:26). Among them, surely Peter and Mark in particular rejoice in our encounter today. Great is the bond uniting them. We need only think of the fact that Saint Mark put at the heart of his Gospel Peter's profession of faith: "You are the Christ". It was the answer to Jesus ever urgent question: "But who do you say that I am?" (*Mk* 8:29). Today too, many people cannot answer this question; there are even few people who can raise it, and above all few who can answer it with the joy of knowing Jesus, that same joy with which we have the grace of confessing him together.

Together, then, we are called to bear witness to him, to carry our faith to the world, especially in the way it is

meant to be brought: by living it, so that Jesus' presence can be communicated with life and speak the language of gratuitous and concrete love. As Coptic Orthodox and Catholics, we can always join in speaking this common language of charity: before undertaking a charitable work, we would do well to ask if we can do it together with our brothers and sisters who share our faith in Jesus. Thus, by building communion in the concreteness of a daily lived witness, the Spirit will surely open providential and unexpected paths to unity.

It is with this constructive apostolic spirit that Your Holiness continues to show a genuine and fraternal attention for the Coptic Catholic Church. I am most grateful for this closeness, which has found praiseworthy expression in the *National Council of Christian Churches*, which you have established so that believers in Jesus can work together more closely for the benefit of Egyptian society as a whole. I also greatly appreciated the generous hospitality offered to the thirteenth Meeting of the *International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches*, which took place here last year at your invitation. It is a promising sign that the following meeting took place this year in Rome, as if to bespeak a particular continuity between the Sees of Mark and Peter.

In the sacred Scriptures, Peter seems in some way to reciprocate the affection of Mark by calling him "my son" (*1 Pet* 5:13). But the Evangelist and his apostolic activity are also fraternally associated with Saint Paul, who, before dying a martyr in Rome, mentions Mark's great usefulness in his ministry (cf. *2 Tim* 4:11) and speaks of him frequently (cf. *Philem* 24; *Col* 4:10). *Fraternal charity* and *communion in mission*: these are the messages that the word of God and our own origins have bequeathed to us. They are the evangelical seeds that we rejoice to water together and, with God's help, to make grow (cf. *1 Cor* 3:6-7).

The deepening progress of our ecumenical journey is also sustained, in mysterious and quite relevant way, by a genuine *ecumenism of blood*. Saint John tells us that Jesus came "with water and blood" (*1 Jn* 5:6); whoever believes in him thus "overcomes the world" (*1 Jn* 5:5). With water and blood: by living a new life in our common baptism, a life of love always and for all, even at the cost of the sacrifice of one's life. How many martyrs in this land, from the first centuries of Christianity, have lived their faith heroically to the end, shedding their blood rather than denying the Lord and yielding to the enticements of evil, or merely to the temptation of repaying evil with evil! The venerable *Martyrology of the Coptic Church* bears eloquent witness to this. Even in recent days, tragically, the innocent blood of defenceless Christians was cruelly shed: their innocent blood unites us. Most dear brother, just as the heavenly Jerusalem is one, so too is our martyrology; your sufferings are also our sufferings. Strengthened by this witness, let us strive to oppose violence by preaching and sowing goodness, fostering concord and preserving unity, praying that all these sacrifices may open the way to a future of full communion between us and of peace for all.

The impressive history of holiness of this land is distinguished not only by the sacrifice of the martyrs. No sooner had the ancient persecutions ended, than a new and selfless form of life arose as a gift of the Lord: monasticism originated in the desert. Thus, the great signs that God had once worked in Egypt and at the Red Sea (cf. *Ps* 106:21-22) were followed by the miracle of a new life that made the desert blossom with sanctity. With veneration for this shared patrimony, I have come as a pilgrim to this land that the Lord himself loves to visit. For here, in his glory he came down upon Mount Sinai (cf. *Ex* 24:16), and here, in his humility, he found refuge as a child (cf. *Mt* 2:14).

Your Holiness, dearest brother, may the same Lord today grant us to set out together as pilgrims of communion and messengers of peace. On this journey, may the Virgin Mary take us by the hand, she who brought Jesus here, and whom the great Egyptian theological tradition has from of old acclaimed as *Theotokos*, the Mother of God. In this title, humanity and divinity are joined, for in his Mother, God became forever man. May the Blessed Virgin, who constantly leads us to Jesus, the perfect symphony of divine and human, bring yet once more a bit of heaven to our earth.