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Audience with the Moderator of the Church of Scotland

At 10.00 this morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience Rev. Dr. Derek Browning, Moderator of the Church of Scotland.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Moderator,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I offer you a warm welcome and I thank the Moderator for his thoughtful remarks, and also for our meeting [private, which took place previously]. Your presence affords me the opportunity to offer a warm greeting to all the members of the Church of Scotland.

Our meeting takes place during the fifth centenary of the Reformation, which I joined in commemorating last year in Lund. Let us thank the Lord for the great gift of being able to live this year in true fraternity, no longer as adversaries, after long centuries of estrangement and conflict. This has been possible, with God's grace, by the ecumenical journey that has enabled us to grow in mutual understanding, trust and cooperation. The mutual purification of memory is one of the most significant fruits of this common journey. The past cannot be changed, yet today we at last see one another as God sees us. For we are first and foremost his children, reborn in Christ through the one Baptism, and therefore brothers and sisters. For so long we regarded one another from afar, all too humanly, harbouring suspicion, dwelling on differences and errors, and with hearts intent on recrimination for past wrongs.

In the spirit of the Gospel, we are now pursuing the path of humble charity that leads to overcoming division and healing wounds. We have begun a dialogue of communion, employing language befitting those who belong to God. Such language is essential to evangelization, for how can we proclaim the God of love if we do not love

one another (cf. 1 Jn 4:8)? It was in Scotland itself, in Edinburgh, more than a hundred years ago, Christian missionaries had the courage to set forth once again with renewed vigour the firm will of Jesus that we be one, “so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). They understood that proclamation and mission are not fully credible unless they are accompanied by unity. This remains as true now as it was then.

I have learned that the emblem of the Church of Scotland depicts the burning bush before which Moses encountered the living God. I am struck by the fact that in this great biblical text the Lord calls himself by a name that will echo down the centuries: “the God of your fathers” (Ex 3:15). In this way, he calls us too, as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, to enter into a history of prior relationships and to live the life of faith not as isolated individuals and in theory, but within a concrete community, a “we”. For no one becomes a Christian by himself and no one can live as a Christian without others. We belong to the family of believers, of so many of our brothers and sisters who have begun to walk in newness of life through Baptism (cf. Rm 6: 4) and who accompany us along that same path.

My thoughts turn in a particular way to those Christians who in our day face grave trials and sufferings, enduring persecution for the name of Jesus. So many of them bear a heavy cross as they profess their faith, many to the point of martyrdom. Their witness impels us to persevere, with love and courage, to the end. Our dialogue directed to full unity, our witness and our shared service, our commitment to pray for one another and to overcome the wounds of the past: these are also a response that is owed to them, within this great “we” of faith.

It is my prayerful hope that the journey to visible unity will continue daily and bear rich fruits for the future, as it has in the recent past. The Catholic Church, especially through the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, has engaged for decades in a fruitful cooperation with the Church of Scotland and the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and desires to continue on this path. With gratitude for your presence here and on the ecumenical journey, I ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen our fellowship in Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. And to Him we turn together in prayer for each other: “Our Father…”