



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Audience with the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople

At 11.00 this morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience in the Apostolic Palace the delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and addressed the following words to them:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers in Christ,

I offer a cordial greeting and a warm welcome to you, the distinguished members of the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate whom my beloved brother Bartholomew and the Holy Synod have sent on the occasion of the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. Your presence manifests the solid bonds existing between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople, and our common effort to journey towards the fullness of communion for which we long, in obedience to the clear will of Jesus (cf. *Jn* 17:21). The feast of Saints Peter and Paul, which falls on the same day in the liturgical calendars of East and West, invites us to renew the charity that generates unity.

At the same time, this feast reminds us of the apostolic courage of proclamation, which also entails a commitment to respond to the new challenges of the present time. This, too, is fidelity to the Gospel. With regard to such concern for today's situation, I like to think of the attention given by the Ecumenical Patriarch to the protection of creation; it has been a source of inspiration for me as well. Given the alarming ecological crisis that we are experiencing, promoting care for our common home is not only, for us believers as for all others, a pressing need that can no longer be deferred, but also a concrete way to serve our neighbour in the spirit of the Gospel. I likewise see as a positive sign the cooperation between the Catholic Church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate concerning other timely questions, such as efforts to combat modern forms of slavery, the need to accept and integrate migrants, displaced persons and refugees, and the promotion of peace at various levels.

Last month, during my pastoral journeys to Bulgaria and Romania, I had the joy of meeting Patriarchs Neofit and Daniel and their Holy Synods, and was able to admire the faith and wisdom of those Pastors. On such

occasions, as in my different meetings with my brother Bartholomew and with other Heads of Churches, I have been able to appreciate the spiritual richness present in Orthodoxy. I assure you that I left those countries with a greater desire for communion. I am increasingly convinced that the restoration of full unity between Catholics and Orthodox will come about through respect for specific identities and a harmonious coexistence in legitimate forms of diversity. The Holy Spirit, for that matter, is the one who creatively awakens a multiplicity of gifts, harmonizes them and brings them into authentic unity, which is not uniformity but a symphony of many voices in charity. As Bishop of Rome I wish to reaffirm that, for us Catholics, the purpose of dialogue is full communion in legitimate forms of diversity, not a monotonous levelling, much less absorption.

For this reason, I consider it valuable in our encounters to share our roots, to rediscover the goodness that the Lord has sown and made grow in each of us, and to share it, learning from one another and helping each other not to fear dialogue and concrete collaboration. The scandal of divisions not fully healed can only be removed by the grace of God as we journey together, accompanying in prayer each other's steps, proclaiming the Gospel in harmony, working to serve those in need and dialoguing in truth, without allowing ourselves to be conditioned by past prejudices. Thus, in that sincerity and transparency which the Lord loves, we will grow closer to one another and come to appreciate more fully our own identity. We will grow in knowledge and mutual affection. We will experience the fact that, for all our differences, there is indeed much more that unites us and inspires us to move forward together.

Your Eminence, dear Brothers, I thank you for your visit and for your kind expression of closeness. I ask you to convey my warm fraternal greetings to His Holiness Bartholomew and to the members of the Holy Synod. And I ask you also, please, to keep for me a place in your prayers. May God the Almighty and Merciful, through the intercession of the Holy Apostles Peter, Paul and Andrew, the brother of Peter, bless and sustain our efforts on the path to full communion. Thank you.
