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Apostolic Trip of His Holiness Francis to Thailand and Japan (19 to 26 November 2019) – Visit to the Supreme Patriarch of the Buddhists in the Wat Ratchabophit Sathit Maha Simaram Temple

Visit to the Supreme Patriarch of the Buddhists in the *Wat Ratchabophit Sathit Maha Simaram* Temple

This morning, at 10.00 local time (4.00 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis visited the Supreme Patriarch of the Buddhists, Somdet Somdet Phra Ariyavongsagatanana IX, in the *Wat Ratchabophit Sathit Maha Simaram* Temple.

Upon arrival, the Pope was received at the entrance to the complex by the secretary to the Patriarch, and they proceeded to the Temple together.

After the welcome speech by the Supreme Patriarch, the Holy Father gave his greeting. Then, following the exchange of gifts, a brief private meeting took place, during which emphasis was placed on the value of fraternity between the two religions in order to promote peace. At the end, before the greetings of the two delegations, the Holy Father and the Supreme Patriarch of the Buddhists exchanged reciprocal blessings. Finally, after the signing of the Book of Honour and the official photo, the Pope took leave of the Supreme Patriarch and, before leaving the structure, in the central courtyard, he posed for a photograph with 35 nuns of the Wat Pho Monastery. He then transferred by car to the Saint Louis Hospital for the meeting with medical staff.

The following is the Holy Father's greeting to the Supreme Patriarch:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Your Holiness,

I thank you for your gracious words of welcome. At the beginning of my visit to this nation, I am pleased to come to this Royal Temple, a symbol of the values and teachings that characterize this beloved people. The majority

of Thais have drunk deeply from the sources of Buddhism, which have imbued their way of venerating life and their ancestors, and leading a sober lifestyle based on contemplation, detachment, hard work and discipline (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 6). These traits nurture your distinctive characteristic as a “smiling people”.

Our meeting takes place as part of the journey of esteem and mutual recognition initiated by our predecessors. I would like this visit to follow in their footsteps, in order to increase respect but also friendship between our communities. Almost fifty years have passed since the seventeenth Supreme Patriarch, Somdej Phra Wanarat (Pun Punnasiri), together with a group of distinguished Buddhist monks, visited Pope Paul VI in the Vatican. This represented a very significant turning point in the development of the dialogue between our religious traditions, which subsequently enabled Pope John Paul II to visit this Temple and the Supreme Patriarch, His Holiness Somdej Phra Ariyavongsagatanana (Vasana Vasano).

I myself recently had the honour of welcoming a delegation of monks from the Wat Pho temple, who presented me with a translation of an ancient Buddhist manuscript in the Pali language kept in the Vatican Library. These are small steps which help testify that *the culture of encounter* is possible, not only within our communities but also in our world, so prone to creating and spreading conflict and exclusion. When we have the opportunity to appreciate and esteem one another in spite of our differences (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 250), we offer a word of hope to the world, which can encourage and support those who increasingly suffer the harmful effects of conflict. Occasions like this remind us how important it is for religions to become more and more beacons of hope, as promoters and guarantors of fraternity.

In this regard, I am grateful to the people of this land, because, since the arrival of Christianity in Thailand some four and a half centuries ago, Catholics have enjoyed freedom in religious practice, despite their being in a minority, and for many years have lived in harmony with their Buddhist brothers and sisters.

On this path of mutual trust and fraternity, I wish to reiterate my personal commitment, and that of the whole Church, to furthering an open and respectful dialogue in the service of the peace and well-being of this people. Thanks to scholarly exchanges, which lead to greater mutual understanding, as well as the exercise of contemplation, mercy and discernment – common to both our traditions – we can grow and live together as good “neighbors”. We will likewise be able to promote among the followers of our religions the development of new charitable projects, capable of generating and multiplying practical initiatives on the path of fraternity, especially with regard to the poor and our much-abused common home. In this way, we will contribute to the formation of a culture of compassion, fraternity and encounter, both here and in other parts of the world (cf. *ibid.*). I am sure, Your Holiness, that this journey will continue to bear fruit in abundance.

Once again, I thank Your Holiness for this meeting. I pray that you may be granted every divine blessing for your own health and well-being, and for your high responsibility of guiding the followers of Buddhism in the ways of peace and concord.

Thank you!
