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Audience with the Ecumenical Delegation from Finland

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This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience an ecumenical delegation from Finland, on the occasion of the annual pilgrimage to Rome, to celebrate the Feast of Saint Henrik, patron of the country.

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

Address of the Holy Father

I offer a cordial welcome to you, the members of the ecumenical Delegation from Finland, who have come to Rome on pilgrimage for the feast of Saint Henry. Thank you very much, Bishop Keskitalo, my brother, for your kind gift and your remarks on humility, repentance and forgiveness. Some people may consider those words negative, but they are the most positive words we have for moving forward. It is with particular joy that I welcome and greet the Sami representatives. May God accompany you on the journey towards reconciliation and healing of memory, and make all Christians free and determined in the earnest search for truth! It is a pleasure to receive Emeritus Bishop Teemi Sippo, who has recovered from a grave accident; by his presence here, he reminds us that true courage consists of getting up and going forward. I ask you likewise to convey my fraternal greeting to Orthodox Metropolitan Arseni of Kuopio and Karelia, who was not able to accompany you.

Dear brothers and sisters, your welcome visit comes on the eve of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This year's theme is taken from the Gospel of Matthew: "We Saw the Star in the East, and We Came to Worship Him" (Mt 2:2). The reference is to the Magi, who at the end of a long journey, found Jesus and worshiped him. The Magi reached the goal because they sought it. Yet they sought it because the Lord, by the sign of the star, had first set out in search of them. They found because they sought, and they sought because they had themselves been sought. It is good to see life this way, as a journey of seeking that does not start with ourselves, but with the One who first set out in search of us and attracts us to himself by his grace. Everything is born of the grace of God who draws us to him. And our response must surely be like that of the Magi: a journey undertaken

together.

Journeying together. Those who are touched by God's grace cannot turn in on themselves and live only for themselves; they are always on the march, always driven to go forward. And to go forward together. Your pilgrimage here is a fine example of this. The ecclesial tradition has seen the Magi as representatives of diverse cultures and peoples. We too, especially in these times, are challenged to take by the hand our brothers and sisters, with their concrete history, and to move forward together. Dear friends, we have set out on a journey led by God's kindly light that dissipates the darkness of division and directs our journey towards unity. We have set out, as brothers and sisters, on the journey towards ever fuller communion. In this ecumenical pilgrimage, let us help one another to advance, in the words of the Rule of St. Benedict (LXII, 4), "ever closer to God", *magis et magis ad Deum*. The world needs God's light, and that light shines only in love, in communion and in fraternity.

Some stages of the journey are more easy, and call us to advance rapidly and with perseverance. I think for example of the many works of charity that, while drawing us closer to the Lord present in the poor and needy, also unite us among ourselves. At times however, the journey becomes more demanding and, before goals that seem still distant and hard to achieve, can lead to a certain weariness and a temptation to discouragement. In this case, let us remind ourselves that we are making this journey not as those who already possess God but as those who continue to seek him. Consequently, we need to press forward with humility and patience, and always together, in order to encourage and support one another, for this is what Christ desires. Let us help one another whenever we see others in need. On every pilgrimage, there come times when we need to stop in order to regain our energy and to see the goal more clearly. As seekers of God, journeying towards full communion with him and with one another, we can see before us two such important moments.

In 2025, we will celebrate the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. The Trinitarian and Christological confession of that Council, which acknowledges Jesus to be "true God from true God" and "consubstantial with the Father", unites us with all those who are baptized. In view of this great anniversary, let us renew our enthusiasm for journeying together in the way of Christ, in the way that *is* Christ! For we need him and the newness and incomparable joy that he brings. Only by clinging to him will we reach the end of the path leading to full unity. For it is Christ whom the men and women of every time, including our own, are seeking, however unconsciously.

The second moment: in 2030 – whether we will be around or not, I don't know – we will commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession. At a time when Christians were about to set out on different paths, that Confession attempted to preserve unity. We know that it did not succeed in preventing division, but the forthcoming anniversary can serve as a fruitful occasion to encourage and confirm us on our journey of communion, so that we can become more docile to God's will, and less to human strategies, more disposed to prefer to earthly aims the route pointed out by Heaven.

[To the Sami representative:] I would like to thank you, dear brother, because you took the four dreams I had for Amazonia and applied them to the native peoples of your land. I am reminded that a pastor must be concrete with concrete people, but must never stop dreaming. A pastor who grows tired of dreaming is somehow lacking. Thank you for dreaming!

Then, something else about the journey of ecumenism. When will unity be achieved? That is the question, no? A great Orthodox theologian who specialized in eschatology once said that unity will come about in the eschaton. What is important is the journey towards unity. It is very good that theologians study and discuss; that is what specialists are for. But it is also good that we, the faithful people of God, walk together on the journey. Together. And let us "build" unity through prayer, works of charity and mutual cooperation. I know that you are taking that route and I thank you.

Dear friends, your customary pilgrimage here is a fine and encouraging sign of ecumenism, which I like very much. For this, I thank you. Let us progress together in seeking God boldly and in concrete ways. Let us keep our gaze ever fixed on Christ (cf. *Heb 12:2*) and remain close to one another in prayer. And so, I now invite all of us to pray together the Our Father, each in his or her own language.