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Audience with members of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Dialogue Commission (ARCIC)

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father received in audience members of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Dialogue Commission (ARCIC), whom he greeted with the following words:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to meet you and I offer you a cordial welcome. I am grateful for the kind words of greeting that the Co-Presidents have addressed to me in your name.

The words of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians, quoted by Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey in their Common Declaration some sixty years ago, have guided your dialogue ever since: “Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (*Phil 3:13–14*). In three phases, your Dialogue Commission has sought to leave behind what compromises our communion and to nurture the bonds that unite Catholics and Anglicans. Yours has been a journey, at times fast, at times slow and difficult. Yet I would emphasize that it has been, and continues to be, a journey. This is very important.

Journey, then, is the first word on which I would like to reflect with you. It is the subject of your latest document, entitled “*Walking Together on the Way*”. This means, in the words of the Apostle of the Nations, moving forward, leaving behind the things that divide, past and present, and keeping our gaze fixed on Jesus and the goal that he desires and points out to us: the goal of visible unity between us. That unity must be received with humility, as a grace of the Spirit, and is to be pursued by “walking together”, supporting one another on the journey.

For ecumenical dialogue is a journey. It is about much more than simply talking to one another. It is about

doing, not just speaking. It involves getting to know one another personally and not merely through books, sharing our aspirations and moments of fatigue, and soiling our hands in shared service to our wounded brothers and sisters discarded on the waysides of our world. It involves approaching with a single gaze and a common commitment God's creation all around us, and encouraging one another to persevere on the journey. That is what it means to walk together. As you know, the Catholic Church has inaugurated a synodal process: for this common journey to be truly such, the contribution of the Anglican Communion cannot be lacking. We look upon you as valued travelling companions.

As part of this concrete journey, I wish to recommend to your prayers an important step. Archbishop Justin Welby and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, two dear brothers, will be my travelling companions when, in a few weeks time, we will at last be able to travel to South Sudan. The visit was postponed on account of the troubles in that country. My brother Justin is sending his wife ahead of us for the works of preparation and charity. This is the fine work he is doing with his wife, as a couple, and I thank her very much. Ours will be an ecumenical pilgrimage of peace. Let us pray that it may inspire Christians in South Sudan and everywhere to be promotoris of reconciliation, patient weavers of concord, capable of saying no to the perverse and useless spiral of violence and of arms. I would mention that this process began a few years ago with a spiritual retreat, here in the Vatican, with the leaders of South Sudan, together with Justin and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland. An ecumenical journey with the political leaders of South Sudan.

I would like to share with you a second word: *gift*. If "journey" speaks of ways and means, "gift" reveals the very soul of ecumenism. Every search for deeper communion must be an exchange of gifts, where each makes his or her own the seeds that God has sown in the other. This concern has also been central to the latest work of your Commission.

The question that arises is: what attitude should we take, lest an exchange of gifts not be reduced to a kind of formal or ceremonial gesture? What is the right way? To speak honestly to one another both about ecclesiological and ethical questions, to discuss uncomfortable topics, is risky; it could increase distances rather than promoting encounter. We should realize, instead, that such an encounter requires, as its basic conditions, humility and truth. We must begin, then, by admitting and sharing the struggles we experience. This is the first step: not to be concerned with appearing attractive and secure to our brothers and sisters, presenting ourselves the way we would like to be, but with showing them with an open heart how we are in reality, including our limitations.

The sins that have led to our historical divisions can only be surmounted in humility and truth, beginning with experiencing sorrow for our reciprocal wounds and the need to give and receive mutual forgiveness (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 34). This demands courage, but it is the spirit of gift, since each true gift entails sacrifice, entails transparency and courage, and openness to forgiveness. Only in this way will the various exchanges of gifts and experiences help to overcome the usual formalities and touch hearts. Only in this way will we become attuned to the Holy Spirit, the gift of God, bestowed upon us in order to restore our harmony, for he himself is harmony that reconciles unity in diversity. I think of a phrase in Saint Basil's book on the Holy Spirit: "*Ipse harmonia est*" – He himself is harmony. The Holy Spirit is the one who creates "disorder" – we can think of the morning of Pentecost – but then the one who creates harmony.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are never given for the exclusive use of those who receive them. They are blessings meant for all God's people: the graces we receive are intended for others, not for our own private use, and the graces others receive are necessary for us. In the exchange of gifts, then, we learn that we cannot be self-sufficient without the graces granted to others. May the Holy Spirit continue to inspire your work, and may each of us personally experience the joy and comfort of his grace. I thank you for all that you are doing and I ask you, please, to pray for me; I need it.

Before concluding, I would like to return to some words of mine quoted by the bishop: "Unity prevails over conflict". Conflicts made us closed. We must not be enslaved by conflict. That is why the path to unity prevails over conflict. Crisis, on the other hand, is good: we need to distinguish between crisis and conflict. In our dialogue, we should enter into crisis, and this is good, because crisis is open, it helps you to overcome, but not

to fall into conflict, which leads you to wars and divisions. I thought of this when he quoted me. Thank you!

And now, I invite, you, if you will, to pray together, because talking without praying is not right! Let us pray the *Our Father*, each in his or her own language.

Our Father...

[Blessing]
