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Audience with a delegation of young priests and monks from the Eastern Orthodox Churches

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation of young priests and monks from the Eastern Orthodox Churches, to whom he addressed the following words:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers,

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you” (2 Cor 13:13). With this greeting of Saint Paul, I wish to offer you my warm welcome and to express my joy at your visit. In the Roman rite, those words of the Apostle frequently open the Eucharistic celebration that, I hope and pray, we shall be able to celebrate together on the day of the Lord’s coming.

It is fitting that your visit takes place on the eve of the Solemnity of Pentecost, which, according to the Latin calendar, will be celebrated this coming Sunday. I would like to offer you four brief reflections inspired by this great feast. They concern the full unity to which we aspire.

The first thought is that *unity is a gift*, a fire from on high. Certainly, we need constantly to pray, work, dialogue and prepare ourselves to receive this extraordinary grace. Yet the attainment of unity is not primarily a fruit of earth, but of heaven. It is not primarily the result of our commitment, our efforts and our agreements, but of the working of the Holy Spirit, to whom we need to open our hearts in trust, so that he can guide us along the path to full communion. Unity is a grace, a gift.

A second thing that Pentecost teaches us is that *unity is harmony*. Your Delegation, composed of Churches of various traditions in communion of faith and sacraments, is a good illustration of this fact. Unity is not uniformity, much less the fruit of compromise or fragile diplomatic balances of power. Unity is harmony in the diversity of the charisms bestowed by the Spirit. For the Holy Spirit loves to awaken both multiplicity and unity, as at Pentecost, where different languages were not reduced to one alone, but were taken up in all their variety. Harmony is the

way of the Spirit, for, as Saint Basil the Great says, the Spirit *is* harmony.

A third teaching of Pentecost is that *unity is a journey*. It is not a plan to be devised or a project to be worked out around a table. Unity does not come about by standing still, but by moving forward with the new energy that the Spirit, from the day of Pentecost, impresses on the disciples. Unity is attained along the way: it grows by sharing each step of the journey, by facing its joys and struggles, and experiencing its unexpected surprises. As Saint Paul told the Galatians, we are called to *walk by the Spirit* (cf. *Gal 5:16.25*). In the words of Saint Irenaeus, whom I recently proclaimed the Doctor of Unity, the Church is *tōn adelphōn synodía*, “a caravan of brothers”. In this caravan, unity grows and matures: a unity that – in God’s quiet way – does not suddenly appear as an overwhelming miracle, but quietly emerges in the patient and persevering progress of a journey made together.

A final aspect. Unity is not simply an end in itself, but is closely tied to the fruitfulness of the Christian proclamation: *unity is for mission*. Jesus prayed for his disciples that they “may all be one... so that the world may believe” (*Jn 17:21*). At Pentecost, the Church was born as a missionary Church. Today too, the world is waiting, however unconsciously, to hear the Gospel message of charity, freedom and peace. It is a message that we are called to bear witness to *with* one another, not *against* one another or *apart from* one another. In this regard, I am grateful for the common witness offered by your Churches. I think in a special way of all those – and there are so many of them – who sealed by their blood their faith in Christ. Thank you for all the seeds of love and hope you have sown in the name of the crucified and risen Christ in all those places that continue, sadly, to be marked by violence and by conflicts that are too often forgotten.

Dear brothers, may the cross of Christ be the compass that directs us on our journey towards full unity. For on that cross Christ, our peace, reconciled us and gathered us into one people (cf. *Eph 2:14*). On the arms of the cross, the altar of unity, I now place these thoughts that I have shared with you. They can act as the cardinal points guiding us towards full communion, which is *gift, harmony, journey and mission*.

I thank you for your visit and I assure you of a remembrance in my prayers. I trust also in your own prayers for me and my ministry. May the Lord bless you and the Mother of God protect you.

Now, if you wish, let us pray together, each in his own language, the Our Father.
