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**Audience with His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East,
and of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the
Assyrian Church of the East**

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience His Holiness Mara Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East.

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

Address of the Holy Father

*Your Holiness,
Dear Sister,
Dear Brothers in Christ,*

“The Lord of the ages... in recent times... has begun to bestow more generously upon divided Christians remorse over their divisions and longing for unity” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1). I am reminded of what the great Zizioulas, a man of God, used to say: “I know the date of unity”. When is it? “The day after the Last Judgement”. Before that there will be no union, but in the meantime we must walk together, pray together and work together. That is what we are doing now. Pope Saint John Paul II welcomed His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, forty years ago, on the occasion of the first official meeting between a Bishop of Rome and a Catholicos Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, as Your Holiness has just recalled. Those words were drawn from the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, whose sixtieth anniversary the Catholic Church celebrates this month. Slowly and one-step at a time.

It was the “longing for unity”, mentioned several times in that Decree (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 7), that prompted our Predecessors to meet. This “*desiderium unitatis*”, in the fine phrase of Saint John Cassian (*Collationes*, 23, 5), is a grace that inspired the ecumenical movement from its origins and one that we must

constantly cultivate. Awakened by the Holy Spirit, it is none other than Christ's own ardent desire, expressed on the eve of his Passion, "that they may all be one" (*Jn 17:21*).

Your Holiness, dear Brother, it is precisely this same "longing for unity" that we experience today as we commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the *Common Christological Declaration* between our Churches, which ended 1,500 years of doctrinal controversy regarding the Council of Ephesus. That historic Declaration recognized the legitimacy and accuracy of the varied expressions of our common Christological faith as formulated by the Fathers in the Nicene Creed. This "hermeneutical" approach was made possible thanks to a fundamental principle affirmed by the conciliar Decree, namely that the same faith, handed down by the Apostles, was expressed and accepted in different forms and ways according to differing conditions of life (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 14). This is a very important principle.

The Common Christological Declaration announced the establishment of a *Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue* between our Churches, which has borne remarkable fruit, also at the pastoral level. I would like to mention in particular the 2001 agreement on the Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari, which permitted for our respective faithful a certain *communicatio in sacris* in particular circumstances, and, in 2017, a *Common Statement on "sacramental life"*. More recently, two years ago, a document on *The Images of the Church in the Syriac and Latin Patristic Traditions* laid the foundation for a common understanding of the Church's constitution.

Today, then, I have an opportunity to thank all of you, the theologian members of the Joint Commission, for your hard work. Indeed, without your work these doctrinal and pastoral agreements would not have been possible. I look forward to the publication of a commemorative volume containing the various documents marking the stages of our journey towards full communion, with a joint preface by Your Holiness and myself. Theological dialogue is indispensable in our journey towards unity, since the unity we yearn for is unity in faith, while the dialogue of truth must never be separated from the dialogue of charity and the dialogue of life. In this way, it is a complete and human dialogue.

That unity in faith has already been achieved by the saints of our Churches. They are our best guides on the path towards full communion. Therefore, with the agreement of Your Holiness and the Patriarch of the Chaldean Church, and encouraged by the recent *Synod of the Catholic Church on Synodality*, which noted that the example of the saints of other Churches is "a gift that we can accept by including their commemoration in our liturgical calendar" (*Final Document*, No. 122), I am pleased to announce that the great Isaac of Nineveh, one of the most venerated Fathers of the Syro-Oriental tradition, acknowledged as a teacher and a saint by all traditions, will be added to the Roman Martyrology.

Through the intercession of Saint Isaac of Nineveh, united to that of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ, our God and Saviour, may the Christians of the Middle East always bear witness to the Risen Christ in those war-torn lands. And may the friendship between our Churches continue to flourish, until the blessed day when we can celebrate together at the same altar and receive the communion of the same Body and Blood of the Saviour, "so that the world may believe" (*Jn 17:21*)!

I thank you, Your Holiness! Let us continue to walk, pray and work together, and let us move forward on this road towards full unity. Thanks to all of you for this visit. Let us remain always united in prayer for one another.

Now, I invite everyone to pray together the prayer that the Lord Jesus taught us, the Our Father. Let each one pray it according to his or her own tradition and language, in a low voice.
