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Audience with the Holy Synod of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church

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This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Holy Synod of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, visiting the Church of Rome for the first time.

The following is the address the Pope delivered to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

*Your Grace,
Dear brothers in Christ!*

This is certainly a joyful day in the long history of our Churches, for it is the first time that the Holy Synod of the Venerable Syro-Malankara Mar Thoma Church has visited the Church of Rome to exchange the embrace of peace with its Bishop. I am grateful for your presence and for your words of friendship. I welcome each one of you and I ask you to convey my best wishes for good health to your Metropolitan, His Beatitude Theodosius Mar Thoma. My greeting likewise goes to all the faithful: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rom 1:7*).

Your Church, heir to both the Syriac tradition of the Saint Thomas Christians and the Reformed tradition, rightly defines itself as a “bridge Church” between East and West. As Your Grace pointed out, the Mar Thoma Church has an ecumenical vocation and it is no coincidence that it became involved in the ecumenical movement early on, establishing a number of bilateral contacts with Christians of different traditions. The first meetings with the Church of Rome took place at the time of the Second Vatican Council, in which His Grace Philipose Mar Chrysostom, the future Metropolitan, participated as an Observer. These are the small steps that bring us closer.

In recent years, Providence has permitted new relations to develop between our Churches. I remember in particular when, in November 2022, I had the joy of receiving you, dear Metropolitan Barnabas. These contacts of ours led to the start of an official dialogue: the first meeting took place last December in Kerala and the next is to take place in a few weeks. I rejoice at the beginning of this dialogue, which I entrust to the Holy Spirit and which I hope will hasten the day when we will be able to share the same Eucharist, in fulfilment of the Lord's prophecy: "They shall come from east and west and sit at table" (cf. *Mt* 8:11).

In this journey of dialogue, I would like to highlight two perspectives: synodality and mission. As for *synodality*, it is significant that you wished to make this visit as the Holy Synod, since your Church is by tradition essentially synodal. As you may know, a few days ago the Catholic Church concluded a Synod on synodality, which was also attended by fraternal Delegates from other Christian traditions who enriched our reflections. One of the convictions expressed is that synodality is inseparable from ecumenism, for both are based on the one Baptism we have received and on the *sensus fidei* in which all Christians share by virtue of Baptism itself. The Final Document of that Assembly states that we must not only "pay greater attention to the synodal practices of our ecumenical partners, both in the East and in the West", but also "imagine ecumenical synodal practices, up to and including forms of consultation and discernment on matters of shared and urgent concern" (No. 138). Your Church, I am sure, can help us on this journey of ecumenical synodality. I am reminded of what the great Zizioulas said about Christian unity. He was a great man, a man of God. He said: "I know the date when there will be full unity between the Churches". What is the date? "The day after the Last Judgement". He added: "But, in the meantime we must walk together, pray together and work together". All together.

Another perspective is that of *mission*. Indeed, synodality and ecumenism are likewise inseparable because both have as their goal a more effective witness on the part of Christians. Nevertheless, mission is not only the goal of the ecumenical journey; it is also its means. I am convinced that working together to bear witness to the Risen Christ is the best way for us to draw closer together. For this reason, as our recent Synod proposed, it is my hope that one day we can celebrate an ecumenical Synod on evangelization (cf. *ibid.*), everyone together. This Synod will help to guarantee, through prayer, reflection and our common commitment, a better Christian witness, "so that the world may believe" (*Jn* 17:21). Here too, I am certain that the Mar Thoma Church, which possesses this missionary dimension, has much to offer. But we all must do it together.

Dear brothers in Christ, once again I thank you for your visit. I entrust myself to your prayers and assure you of my own. If you wish, we may now conclude by reciting together the Lord's Prayer.
