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UDIENZA ALLA DELEGAZIONE DEL PATRIARCATO ECUMENICO

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Il Santo Padre Giovanni Paolo II ha ricevuto ieri mattina in Udienza una Delegazione del Patriarcato Ecumenico guidata da Sua Eminenza Athanasios, Metropolita di Heliopolis e Theira, ed ha loro rivolto il discorso che riportiamo di seguito:

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (*Eph 1:2*).

Venerable Brothers,

1. It is with great joy that I thank His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and the Holy Synod for sending you to Rome for the Feast of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul. Your presence adds greatly to the joy of the Church of Rome as she celebrates her Patron Saints. The exchange of visits between Rome and Constantinople for our respective feast days has become an established custom and helps us to maintain ecumenical contacts in a spirit of prayer and fraternal consultation.

For the feast of Saint Andrew in 1979, I was able to visit the Ecumenical Patriarchate and confirm the Catholic Church's desire to continue on the path which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, will lead to unity among all those who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour. For the feast of Saints Peter and Paul in 1995, I had the privilege of welcoming to Rome His Holiness Bartholomew I, when we, like the brothers Peter and Andrew, gave each other encouragement in the following of the One who is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (*Jn 14:6*).

2. Our meeting today is taking place during the celebration of the Jubilee Year. I take the occasion to express my deep gratitude to the Ecumenical Patriarchate for having sent delegations to the two main ecumenical events of the Roman calendar of the Year 2000, namely the Solemn Opening of the Holy Door of the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, and the Ecumenical Commemoration of the Witnesses of Faith of the Twentieth Century. For her part, the Church of Rome willingly responded to the appeal of His Holiness the Patriarch for a Vigil of Prayer in preparation for the feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord.

The heart of the Jubilee Year is the universal call to reconciliation and peace. Together, Catholic and Orthodox Christians must create a future of more intense cooperation and brotherly love, leading to the full communion which is the Lord's will for us. The prophetic words of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I in their joint Declaration of 1967 should be our constant inspiration: "The spirit which ought to inspire these efforts is the spirit of loyalty to the truth and of mutual understanding, with the effective desire to avoid the grievances of the past and every form of spiritual and intellectual domination" (*Tomos Agapis*, No. 195).

3. In the search for more fraternal relations between the Churches, the importance of a purification of memories makes itself felt at every turn. Tragic events of history have left a sad legacy in the minds and psychology of Catholics and Orthodox. I entrust to the mercy of God every such action not in harmony with God's will for which sons and daughters of the Catholic Church have been responsible. Let us, together, in the Third Christian Millennium write a new history in a spirit of brotherly love, respect and cooperation.

4. Within a few days the Joint Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches will meet in plenary session. I shall accompany the work of the Commission with my prayers. It is my earnest wish that the dialogue may resume its normal course with new energy and commitment.

Dear Brothers, I thank you again for your visit and ask you to convey to His Holiness the Patriarch and to the Holy Synod my sentiments of deep esteem and respect. May the Lord grant us to grow always in mutual love. May he guide our steps on the way to full communion.

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