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Lettera del Santo Padre Francesco a Sua Santità Tawadros II per la giornata dell'amicizia copto-cattolica (10 maggio 2016)

*To His Holiness Tawadros II
Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark*

Recalling with pleasure the third anniversary of our fraternal meeting in Rome on 10 May 2013, I offer heartfelt best wishes to Your Holiness for peace and health, and I express my joy at the ever deeper spiritual bonds uniting the See of Peter and the See of Mark.

It is with gratitude to the Lord our God that I recall the steps we have taken together along the path of reconciliation and friendship. After centuries of silence, misunderstanding and even hostility, Catholics and Copts increasingly are encountering one another, entering into dialogue, and cooperating together in proclaiming the Gospel and serving humanity. In this renewed spirit of friendship, the Lord helps us to see that the bond uniting us is born of the same call and mission we received from the Father on the day of our baptism. Indeed, it is through baptism that we become members of the one Body of Christ that is the Church (cf. *1 Cor* 12:13), God's own people, who proclaim his praises (cf. *1 Pet* 2:9). May the Holy Spirit, the mainspring and bearer of all gifts, unite us evermore in the bond of Christian love and guide us in our shared pilgrimage, in truth and charity, towards full communion.

I would like also to express to Your Holiness my deep appreciation for the generous hospitality offered during the thirteenth meeting of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, held in Cairo at the invitation of the Patriarchate of the See of Saint Mark. I am grateful to you for receiving the members of the Joint Commission at the Saint Bishoy Monastery in Wadi Natrum, and I am certain that we share the ardent hope that this important dialogue may continue to progress and bear abundant fruits.

Though we are still journeying towards the day when we will gather as one at the same eucharistic table, we are able even now to make visible the communion uniting us. Copts and Catholics can witness together to important values such as the holiness and dignity of every human life, the sanctity of marriage and family life, and respect for the creation entrusted to us by God. In the face of many contemporary challenges, Copts and Catholics are

called to offer a common response founded upon the Gospel. As we continue our earthly pilgrimage, if we learn to bear each other's burdens and to exchange the rich patrimony of our respective traditions, then we will see more clearly that what unites us is greater than what divides us.

Your Holiness, every day my thoughts and prayers are with the Christian communities in Egypt and the Middle East, so many of whom are experiencing great hardship and tragic situations. I am well aware of your grave concern for the situation in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Syria, where our Christian brothers and sisters and other religious communities are facing daily trials. May God our Father grant peace and consolation to all those who suffer, and inspire the international community to respond wisely and justly to such unprecedented violence.

On this occasion that has rightly become known as the day of friendship between Copts and Catholics, I willingly exchange with Your Holiness a fraternal embrace of peace in Christ the Risen Lord.

From the Vatican, 10 May 2015

FRANCIS

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