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Messaggio del Santo Padre Francesco a Sua Santità Bartolomeo I, Patriarca Ecumenico, per la Festa di Sant'Andrea

To His All Holiness Bartholomew
Archbishop of Constantinople
Ecumenical Patriarch

On the feast of the Apostle Andrew, beloved brother of Saint Peter and patron saint of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, I joyfully convey my spiritual closeness to Your All Holiness once again through the delegation. I join you in giving thanks to God for the rich fruits of divine providence manifest in the life of Saint Andrew.

I likewise pray that through his powerful intercession our Lord, who called him to be among his first disciples, will abundantly bless you, your brothers in the episcopate and members of the Holy Synod, and all the clergy, monks and lay faithful gathered for the Divine Liturgy celebrated in the Patriarchal Church of Saint George at the Phanar. Calling to mind the charity, apostolic zeal and perseverance of Saint Andrew is a source of encouragement in these difficult and critical times. Giving glory to God also strengthens our faith and hope in the one who welcomed into eternal life the holy martyr Andrew, whose faith endured in time of trial.

I recall with great joy the presence of Your All Holiness at the international meeting for peace held in Rome on 20 October last, with the participation of representatives of various Churches and other religious traditions. Together with the challenges posed by the current pandemic, war continues to afflict many parts of the world, while new armed conflicts emerge to steal the lives of countless men and women. Undoubtedly all initiatives taken by national and international entities aimed at promoting peace are useful and necessary, yet conflict and violence will never cease until all people reach a deeper awareness that they have a mutual responsibility as brothers and sisters. In light of this, the Christian Churches, together with other religious traditions, have a primary duty to offer an example of dialogue, mutual respect and practical cooperation.

With profound gratitude to God, I have experienced this fraternity at first hand in the various encounters we have shared. In this regard, I acknowledge that the desire for ever greater closeness and understanding between Christians was manifest in the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople before the Catholic Church and other Churches engaged themselves in dialogue. This can be seen clearly in the encyclical letter of the Holy Synod of

the Ecumenical Patriarchate addressed to the Churches worldwide exactly one hundred years ago. Indeed, its words remain relevant today: “When the several Churches are inspired by love, and place it before everything else in their judgment of the others and in relation towards each other, they will be able, instead of increasing and widening the existing dissentions, to lessen and diminish the same as far as possible; and by promoting a constant brotherly interest in the condition, the stability, and the prosperity of the other Churches, by their eagerness in watching what is happening in those Churches, and by obtaining a more accurate knowledge of them, and by their readiness to give, whenever occasion arises, a hand of help and assistance, they then will do and achieve many good things to the glory and profit both of themselves and of the whole Christian body, and to the advance of the matter of the union”.

We can thank God that relations between the Catholic Church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate have grown much over the past century, even as we continue to yearn for the goal of the restoration of full communion expressed through participation at the same Eucharistic altar. Although obstacles remain, I am confident that by walking together in mutual love and pursuing theological dialogue, we will reach that goal. This hope is based on our common faith in Jesus Christ, sent by God the Father to gather all people into one body, and the cornerstone of the one and holy Church, God’s holy temple, in which all of us are living stones, each according to our own particular charism or ministry bestowed by the Holy Spirit.

With these sentiments, I renew my warmest best wishes for the feast of Saint Andrew, and exchange with Your All Holiness an embrace of peace in the Lord.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 30 November 2020

FRANCIS

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