



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL
DIALOGUE
BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES**

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 27 January 2017*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers in Christ,

In offering you a joyful welcome, I thank you for your presence and for the kind words that Metropolitan Bishoy addressed to me on your behalf. I also thank you for that beautiful and richly meaningful icon of the Blood of Christ, which shows redemption from the womb of the Mother of God. It is indeed lovely. Through you, I send cordial greetings to the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, my venerable brothers.

I am grateful for the work of your Commission, which began in 2003 and is now holding its fourteenth meeting. Last year you began an examination of the nature of the sacraments, especially baptism. It is precisely in baptism that we rediscovered the basis of communion between Christians. As Catholics and Oriental Orthodox, we can repeat the words of the Apostle Paul: “For in the one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body” (*1 Cor 12:13*). In the course of this week, you have further reflected on historical, theological and ecclesiological aspects of the Holy Eucharist, “the source and summit of the whole Christian life”, which admirably expresses and brings about the unity of God’s people (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). I encourage you to persevere in your efforts and I trust that your work may point out helpful ways to advance on our journey. It will thus facilitate the path towards that greatly desired day when we will have the grace of celebrating the Lord’s Sacrifice at the same altar, as a sign of fully restored ecclesial communion.

Many of you belong to Churches that witness daily the spread of violence and acts of brutality

perpetrated by fundamentalist extremism. We are aware that situations of such tragic suffering more easily take root in the context of great poverty, injustice and social exclusion, due to instability created by partisan interests, often from elsewhere, and by earlier conflicts that have led to situations of dire need, cultural and spiritual deserts where it becomes easy to manipulate and incite people to hatred. Each day your Churches, in drawing near to those who suffer, are called to sow concord and to work patiently to restore hope by offering the consoling peace that comes from the Lord, a peace we are obliged *together* to bring to a world wounded and in pain.

Saint Paul also writes: "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (*1 Cor 12:26*). Your sufferings are our sufferings. I join you in praying for an end to the conflict and for God's closeness to those who have endured so much, especially children, the sick and the elderly. In a particular way, my heart goes out to the bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, and the lay faithful who have been cruelly abducted, taken hostage or enslaved.

May the Christian communities be sustained by the intercession and example of *our* many martyrs and saints who bore courageous witness to Christ and have themselves attained full unity. So what are we waiting for? The martyrs show us the heart of our faith, which does not consist in a generic message of peace and reconciliation but in Jesus himself, crucified and risen. He is our peace and our reconciliation (cf. *Eph 2:14*; *2 Cor 5:18*). As his disciples, we are called to testify everywhere, with Christian fortitude, to his humble love that reconciles men and women in every age. Wherever violence begets more violence and sows death, there our response must be the pure leaven of the Gospel, which, eschewing strategies of power, allows fruits of life to emerge from arid ground and hope to dawn after nights of terror.

The centre of the Christian life, the mystery of Jesus who died and rose out of love, is also the point of reference for our journey towards full unity. Once more the martyrs show us the way. How many times has the sacrifice of their lives led Christians, otherwise divided in so many things, to unity! The martyrs and saints of all ecclesial traditions are already one in Christ (cf. *Jn 17:22*); their names are written in the one common martyrology of God's Church. Having sacrificed themselves on earth out of love, they dwell in the one heavenly Jerusalem, gathered around the Lamb who was slain (*Rev 7:13-17*). Their lives, offered as a gift, call us to communion, to hasten along the path to full unity. Just as in the early Church the blood of the martyrs was the seed of new Christians, so in our own day may the blood of so many martyrs be a seed of unity between believers, a sign and instrument of a future of communion and peace.

Dear brothers, I am grateful for the efforts you make towards attaining this goal. In thanking you for your visit, I invoke upon you and your ministry the blessing of the Lord and the loving protection of the Mother of God.

And now, if you so feel, we can pray together, each in his own language, the Our Father.

[Our Father]

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