



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE DELEGATION OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
ON THE FEAST OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL***

Monday, 29 June 1992 Your Eminence,

Dear Friends, The Psalmist gave expression to an intimate joy when he exclaimed: "How good and how pleasant it is, brothers dwelling in unity!" (Ps. 133 (132):1). With the same gladness I greet you, the members of the Delegation that His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch and his Synod have sent this year to join in our celebration of the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, patrons of the Church of Rome. Your presence, full of meaning because it is a sign of the spiritual and ecclesial communion which unites us, is also an expression of the concrete task which stands before us: our common task, rooted in the one apostolic tradition, of intensifying our relationship as we strive for full communion, in faithful obedience to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ (Cf. Jn. 17:21). Your presence, Eminence, is particularly significant. It affords us an opportunity to take stock of how much progress has been made in relations between our Churches since March 1959 when you came as the Special Envoy of His Holiness Athenagoras I to visit Pope John XXIII, the first Orthodox Bishop to do so, thus setting in motion that rich exchange of contacts which has become known as the "dialogue of charity". The now firmly established practice of celebrating together the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul in Rome and of Saint Andrew at the Phanar is an important part of the development of warm relations between us. These regular contacts facilitate the sharing of ideas and the coordination of practical initiatives. Most importantly, they give us an opportunity to join in prayer before the Lord. Indeed prayer, which is the very soul of the ecumenical movement, serves to purify our endeavours of any secondary or contingent motivations, and sets them firmly within the context of obedience to Christ, the Chief Shepherd of the flock (Cf. 1 Pt. 5:4). For many years the "dialogue of charity" went hand in hand with a rich theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the entire Orthodox Church. More recently, however, practical difficulties have emerged in various parts of the world which seem to have put pressure on these contacts. This is due in part to the sad legacy of the long and tragic period of persecution that Christian communities in various countries have experienced in this century. Clearly, a genuine purification of memories is necessary, with God's help, as well as an increased sense of Christian love and mutual forgiveness. Relations between Christians must always be guided by what Saint Paul teaches us in the First Letter to the Corinthians: "Love is patient and

kind... Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it... rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things"(1 Cor. 13:4-7). Such an attitude is particularly incumbent upon the Pastors of the Church. Hence I wish to assure you that the Church of Rome is fully prepared to cooperate with the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the purpose of strengthening the dialogue of charity, especially in those areas where difficulties have recently emerged. An atmosphere of mutual respect will ensure that words and actions are not misinterpreted but understood in the light of a relationship based on openness and trust. The presence in Rome of a Delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul is a fitting symbol of our desire to improve relations between us. It illustrates our commitment to pray together and to strive together in the quest for the unity which the Lord wishes for his Church. May the Lord abundantly bless us in this task!

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