



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO CYPRUS

(JUNE 4-6, 2010)

ECUMENICAL CELEBRATION

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Archeological area of the church of Agia Kiriaki Chrysopolitissa - Paphos

Friday, 4 June 2010

(Video)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

“Η χάρις και η ειρήνη ας είναι πλούσια μαζί σας” (1 Pet 1:2). Με μεγάλη μου χαρά χαιρετώ εσάς που αντιπροσωπεύετε τις διάφορες χριστιανικές κοινότητες παρούσες στην Κύπρο. [1]

I thank His Beatitude Chrysostomos the Second for his gracious words of welcome, His Eminence Georgios, the Metropolitan of Paphos, our host, and all those who have helped to make this meeting possible. I am also pleased cordially to salute the Christians of other confessions present, including those of the Armenian, Lutheran and Anglican communities.

It is truly an extraordinary grace for us to gather together in prayer in this Church of Agia Kiriaki Chrysopolitissa. We have just heard a reading from the Acts of the Apostles which reminds us that Cyprus was the first stage in the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul (cf. Acts 13:1-4). Set apart by the Holy Spirit, Paul, accompanied by Barnabas, a native of Cyprus, and Mark, the future evangelist, first came to Salamis, where they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues. Traversing the island, they reached Paphos where, close to this very place, they preached in the presence of the Roman pro-consul Sergius Paulus. Thus it was from this place that the Gospel message began to spread throughout the Empire, and the Church, grounded in

the apostolic preaching, was able to take root throughout the then-known world.

The Church in Cyprus can rightly be proud of her direct links to the preaching of Paul, Barnabas and Mark, and her communion in the apostolic faith, a communion which links her to all those Churches who preserve that same rule of faith. This is the communion, real yet imperfect, which already unites us, and which impels us to overcome our divisions and to strive for the restoration of that full visible unity which is the Lord's will for all his followers. For, in Paul's words, "there is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:4-5).

The Church's communion in the apostolic faith is both a gift and a summons to mission. In the passage from Acts which we have heard, we see an image of the Church's unity in prayer, and her openness to the promptings of the Spirit of mission. Like Paul and Barnabas, every Christian, by baptism, is set apart to bear prophetic witness to the Risen Lord and to his Gospel of reconciliation, mercy and peace. In this context, the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops, due to meet in Rome next October, will reflect on the vital role of Christians in the region, encourage them in their witness to the Gospel, and help foster greater dialogue and cooperation between Christians throughout the region. Significantly, the labours of the Synod will be enriched by the presence of fraternal delegates from other Churches and Christian communities in the region, as a sign of our common commitment to the service of God's word and our openness to the power of his reconciling grace.

The unity of all Christ's disciples is a gift to be implored from the Father in the hope that it will strengthen the witness to the Gospel in today's world. The Lord prayed for the holiness and unity of his disciples precisely so that the world might believe (cf. Jn 17:21). Just a hundred years ago, at the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, the acute awareness that divisions between Christians were an obstacle to the spread of the Gospel gave birth to the modern ecumenical movement. Today we can be grateful to the Lord, who through his Spirit has led us, especially in these last decades, to rediscover the rich apostolic heritage shared by East and West, and in patient and sincere dialogue to find ways of drawing closer to one another, overcoming past controversies, and looking to a better future.

The Church in Cyprus, which serves as a bridge between East and West, has contributed much to this process of reconciliation. The path leading to the goal of full communion will certainly not be without its difficulties, yet the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church of Cyprus are committed to advancing in the way of dialogue and fraternal cooperation. May the Holy Spirit enlighten our minds and strengthen our resolve, so that together we can bring the message of salvation to the men and women of our time, who thirst for the truth that brings authentic freedom and salvation (cf. Jn 8:32), the truth whose name is Jesus Christ!

Dear sisters and brothers, I cannot conclude without evoking the memory of the saints who have

adorned the Church in Cyprus, and in particular Saint Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis. Sanctity is the sign of the fullness of Christian life, a profound inner docility to the Holy Spirit who calls us to constant conversion and renewal as we strive to be ever more conformed to Christ our Saviour. Conversion and holiness are also the privileged means by which we open our minds and hearts to the Lord's will for the unity of his Church. As we give thanks for this meeting and for the fraternal affection which unites us, let us ask Saints Barnabas and Epiphanius, Saints Peter and Paul, and all God's holy ones, to bless our communities, to preserve us in the faith of the Apostles, and to guide our steps along the way of unity, charity and peace.

[1] "Grace and peace to you in abundance" (1 Pet 1:2). With great joy I salute you who represent the Christian communities present in Cyprus.

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