



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS
TO HIS HOLINESS BARTHOLOMEW I ON THE OCCASION
OF THE FEAST OF SAINT ANDREW,
PATRON SAINT OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE**

*To Holiness Bartholomew
Archbishop of Constantinople
Ecumenical Patriarch*

It is with great spiritual joy and in profound communion of faith and charity that I join the prayer of the Church of Constantinople in celebrating the feast of its holy patron, the Apostle Andrew, the first-called and brother of the Apostle Peter. My spiritual closeness is manifest once again this year with the presence of a delegation of the Church of Rome, to which I have entrusted the expression of my warmest greetings and best wishes to Your Holiness, to the members of the Holy Synod, to the clergy, monks and all the faithful gathered at the solemn Divine Liturgy in the Patriarchal Church of Saint George. Through the delegation, I convey the assurance of the unwavering intention of the Catholic Church, as well as my own, to continue in our commitment to working towards the re-establishment of full communion among the Christians of the East and the West.

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the foundation of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, jointly inaugurated by Patriarch Dimitrios I and Pope Saint John Paul II during the latter's visit to the Phanar on the occasion of the feast of Saint Andrew. During these years the Joint International Commission has taken many significant steps forward. I convey, therefore, my heartfelt gratitude to all its past and current members for their dedicated commitment. In particular, I recall with gratitude Metropolitan Stylianos, who for many years was the Orthodox Co-Chair of the Commission, and who earlier this year died in the hope of the Resurrection promised to all those who have placed their trust in God. During his visit to the Phanar, Pope Saint John Paul II declared that "the question we should ask ourselves is not whether we can re-establish full communion, but rather whether we have the right to remain separated" (*Address to His Holiness Dimitrios I, Saint George at the Phanar*, 30

November 1979). This question, which is only seemingly rhetorical, continues to challenge our Churches and demands that all the faithful respond with a renewal of both attitude and conduct.

The search for the re-establishment of full communion among Catholics and Orthodox is certainly not confined to theological dialogue, but is also accomplished through other channels of ecclesial life. Our relations are nourished above all through authentic gestures of mutual respect and esteem (cf. *Rom* 12:9). Such actions show a shared fidelity to the word of our one Lord Jesus Christ, and the will to remain together in his love (cf. *Jn* 15:10). This charity is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Gal* 5:22) and a mark of genuine Christian life (cf. *Jn* 13:35). Moreover, mindful of the one baptism in which we have been regenerated, of the one faith that enlivens us, and of the one Holy Spirit who guides us (cf. *Eph* 4:4-5), our closeness grows and intensifies each time that we pray for one another (cf. *Jas* 5:16) and pray together as brothers (cf. *Matt* 18:19-20). Finally, our relationship is seen to be mature when, obedient to the Risen Christ's mandate to take the Gospel to all creatures and to heal the sick (cf. *Mk* 16:15-18), Catholics and Orthodox work together in proclaiming the Good News and in serving the needy. The Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church have already embarked upon this promising journey, as testified by our joint initiatives. I trust also that in local contexts all of us will increasingly strengthen the daily dialogue of love and life in shared spiritual, pastoral, cultural and charitable projects.

Beloved brother in Christ, to whom I am bound by a sincere and fraternal friendship, these are just some of the hopes and sentiments that fill my heart and that I wish to share with you on this joyous occasion. United in prayer to the Apostle Andrew, I renew to you and to all those present my warmest best wishes, and I exchange with you a holy embrace in Christ our Lord.

Franciscus