



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE DELEGATION OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH

Friday, 29 June 2001

Dear Brothers in Christ,

1. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" (1 *Pt* 1: 3).

I wanted to greet you today with Peter's words to the Christians of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. Beloved Brothers, members of the delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarch, His Holiness Bartholomaios I and the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople on the occasion of your visit to the Church of Rome which gives me deep joy. "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Gal* 1,3). We are glad to welcome you, during these days when we are celebrating the feast of Sts Peter and Paul.

This exchange of delegations between the Church of Rome and the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the patronal feasts, during which we honour the memory of the Apostles Peter, Paul and Andrew, is an initiative blessed by the Lord. We can even say that it has now become a natural practice of ecclesial brotherhood. I am deeply happy with this custom and warmly grateful to the Ecumenical Patriarch and to the Holy Synod for their sentiments, which enable us to celebrate the work accomplished by the Lord through the first Apostles. Moreover, it allows us to participate in prayer together and at the same time is an opportunity for regular and harmonious dialogue. By your presence here, dear Brothers, you are taking part in this celebration of the Church of Rome.

2. Among the first disciples, Jesus called two brothers, Simon and Andrew. They were fishermen. "He said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men'. Immediately they left their nets and followed him" (*Mt* 4,19).

Since then, the Gospel message has been taken to the ends of the earth and we are called to continue in history the mission entrusted to the Apostles. Just as the Lord called Peter and Andrew "together", to be fishers of men for the kingdom of God, the successors of the Apostles are invited to proclaim the Good News of salvation together, so that through our words and our fraternal unity the world may believe.

Each year, the presence of a Catholic delegation at the Eucharistic celebration at the Phanar and your participation in the celebration held at St Peter's show that we are called by the Lord to this common mission. However the fact that we cannot take part together in Christ's one sacrifice causes distress and prompts us to seek ways that will enable us to resolve the divergences between Orthodox and Catholics that still endure.

3. To this end, fraternal relations between the particular Catholic and Orthodox Churches must be intensified. It is important to confront and clarify what remains of the theological dispute, relying on Holy Scripture and Tradition. The work of the Joint Commission must be completed in accordance with the programme it has chosen. I know that the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Orthodox Co-President of the Joint Commission are in close contact to decide together on the best way to resume the dialogue. The Catholic Church is also in touch with the autocephalous and autonomous Orthodox Churches. Furthermore, encouraging the dialogue of charity, which has made it possible to create the conditions necessary to begin the theological dialogue, is proving the most direct way for us to meet in truth and reciprocal affection in Christ.

4. The feast of Sts Peter and Paul has once again given us the opportunity to pray together to the Apostles who intercede for all Christ's disciples, so that "they may all be one" and together be "fishers of men" among the young generations of this new millennium, who are thirsting to know Christ and walk beside him. May we announce the Saviour together, to give these generations "a living hope" which never disappoints them.

5. Dear Brothers, I thank you for your visit and ask you to convey my fraternal greetings to His Holiness Bartholomew I and to all the members of the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. May the Lord be with you always! May he guide us on the paths of his kingdom!