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Audience with the delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, on the occasion of the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, in Rome as is customary on the occasion of the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul.

The following is the Pope's address to the members of the delegation:

Address of the Holy Father

I greet you with joy and I welcome you with affection to Rome for the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. I thank Metropolitan Emmanuel for his kind and brotherly words. This annual exchange of delegations between the Church of Rome and that of Constantinople for the feasts of our respective Patrons is a sign of the communion – real, albeit not yet full – which we already share. I am deeply grateful to His Holiness Bartholomew and to the Holy Synod for sending you to be with us and I thank you for your welcome visit.

This year we will celebrate Saints Peter and Paul in a world still struggling to emerge from the dramatic crisis caused by the pandemic. This scourge has tested everyone and everything. Only one thing is more serious than this crisis, and that is the risk that we will squander it, and not learn the lesson it teaches. It is a lesson in humility, showing us that it is not possible to live healthy lives in an unhealthy world, or to go on as we were, without recognizing what went wrong. Even now, the great desire to return to normality can mask the senseless notion that we can go back to relying on false securities, habits and projects that aim exclusively at pursuing wealth and personal interests, while failing to respond to global injustice, the cry of the poor and the precarious health of our planet.

What does all this have to say to us as Christians? We too are called to reflect seriously on whether we want to go back to doing what we did before, as if nothing happened, or instead to take up the challenge of this crisis. Crisis, as the original meaning of the word shows, always implies a judgement, a distinction between good and

bad. In ancient times, it was used of the farmer who separated the good grain from the chaff to be discarded. In a similar way, the present crisis calls us to distinguish, discern and sift, in everything we do, between what is enduring and what is passing.

We believe, as the Apostle Paul teaches, that what endures forever is love, because, while everything else passes away, "love never ends" (1 Cor 13:8). Far from a romantic love, closed in on our personal feelings, desires and emotions, this love is concrete, modelled on that of Jesus. It is the love of the seed that gives life by falling to the earth and dying; the seed that gives life by being broken. It is a love that "does not insist on its own way", that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (vv. 5.7). In the end, the Gospel promises abundant fruit not to those who acquire riches for themselves, or to those who seek their own advantage, but to those who generously share with others, sowing abundantly and freely in a humble spirit of service.

For us Christians on the path to full communion, taking seriously the current crisis means asking ourselves how we wish to move forward. Every crisis represents a crossroads: we can withdraw into ourselves, seeking our own security and expediency, or we can be open to others, which entails risks but also God's promised fruits of grace. Dear brothers, has not the time come for giving further impetus to our efforts, with the help of the Spirit, to break down ancient prejudices and definitively overcome harmful rivalries? Without ignoring the differences that need to be resolved through charitable and truthful dialogue, could we not begin a new phase of relations between our Churches, marked by walking more closely together, by desiring to take real steps forward, by becoming more willing to be truly responsible for one another? If we are docile to love, to the Holy Spirit who is the creative love of God and who brings harmony to diversity, he will open the way to a renewed fraternity.

The witness of growing communion between us Christians will also be a sign of hope for many men and women, who will feel encouraged to promote a more universal fraternity and a reconciliation capable of healing past wrongs. This is the only way to the dawn of a future of peace. A fine prophetic sign would be closer cooperation between Orthodox and Catholics in the dialogue with other religious traditions, an area in which I know you, dear Eminence Emmanuel, are very much involved.

Dear friends, I thank you once more for your presence, and I ask you kindly to convey to His Holiness Bartholomew, whom I regard as my true Brother, my cordial and respectful greetings. Please tell him that I joyfully await his visit here in Rome next October, an occasion for giving thanks to God for the thirtieth anniversary of his election. Through the intercession of Saints Peter and Paul, Princes of the Apostles, and of Saint Andrew, the First-Called, may Almighty God in his mercy bless us and draw us ever closer to his own unity. Finally, dear brothers, please find a place for me in your prayers. Thank you.
