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Audience with the International Commission for Dialogue between the “Disciples of Christ” and the Catholic Church

This morning, before the General Audience, the Holy Father Francis met with the International Commission for Dialogue between the “Disciples of Christ” and the Catholic Church.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

“May grace and peace be yours in abundance” (1 Pet 1:2). I welcome you in the words of this greeting that the Apostle Peter, in difficult times for the Gospel, addressed to the faithful of the diaspora. In our own day, which is not an easy time for faith, we are united in the same confidence that the Apostle sought to transmit, as we place our hope in the God of consolation. For, as he writes, we have been “chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:1-2). In faith in the Trinity, which is communion and exhorts us to communion, I greet you fraternally, and I am grateful for the kind words addressed to me by the Reverend Paul Tch  in the name of the entire Commission. I am pleased to learn that, by reaffirming the goal of full visible unity you have pursued since 1977, in this, the sixth phase of your work, you are engaged in exploring “the ministry of the Spirit”.

As one of your earlier documents declared, “the Holy Spirit not only gives the Church that memory which enables it to remain in the Apostolic Tradition, but is also present in the Church, leading Christians and the whole community of the baptized deeper into the mystery of Christ” (*The Church as Communion in Christ*, 39). The Spirit is thus memory and guide.

Memory. The Holy Spirit, Jesus told us, “will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (Jn 14:26). When we draw near in prayer and with an open heart to the Scriptures inspired by the Spirit, we let

him speak and act within us. Then his salutary memory reminds us of what counts in life and that “nothing is impossible with God” (cf. *Lk* 1:37). The Spirit invites us each day to be “born from above” (cf. *Jn* 1:1-21), and spurs us to love of our brothers and sisters.

Yet the Holy Spirit is not only living memory, he is also our *guide*. As the Second Vatican Council taught, “by the power of the Gospel he rejuvenates the Church, constantly renewing it and leading it to perfect union with its Spouse”. The Spirit “guides the Church in the way of all truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13) and, uniting it in fellowship and ministry, bestows upon it different hierarchical and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs it and adorns it with his fruits” (*Lumen Gentium*, 4). In a word, the Holy Spirit keeps the Christian community young. In him, the true protagonist of mission – let us not forget this: the real protagonist of mission is the Holy Spirit – in him, we rejoice to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and we find the strength to persevere in praise of his name, glorifying and magnifying that name. The Holy Spirit thus preserves our spirit from temptations to discouragement and self-absorption; indeed, such symptoms of a “stifling worldliness can only be healed by breathing in the pure air of the Holy Spirit who frees us from self-centredness cloaked in an outward religiosity bereft of God” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 97).

Dear brothers and sisters, with the eyes of faith, we can recognize, in our lives and in the world around us, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the seeds he sows and his constant activity, even beyond the confines of our communities. If we are docile to the Spirit, he will surely also harmonize all those things that seem difficult to reconcile, for he is, in himself, harmony. The Spirit is harmony: let us not forget this. He allows “divisions”: think of the morning of Pentecost, when there was a great “division” of different charisms... But then he produced harmony, which is not a “negotiated settlement”, no: harmony goes beyond that. And this is the way of the Spirit. We need, then, to set out ever anew from the Spirit, as the memory and guide who opens new and unforeseen trails where we thought that the way was closed or cut off. May we never fear to pursue the paths of concord that the Spirit points out: not the paths of a spiritual worldliness that would conform us to the needs and fashions of the present age, but the paths of communion and mission. Today, as in apostolic times, it is wonderful to be “those who bring good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (*1 Pet* 1:12)!

On the journey of ecclesial communion, and in the dialogue with other Churches and Christian communities, something that has always made me think is what Patriarch Athenagoras said, somewhat lightheartedly, to Paul VI: let us put the theologians on an island and we will journey together. Christian unity is achieved by walking together. Certainly, theologians are necessary: they need to study, to speak, to discuss; but, in the meantime, let us carry on, praying together and with works of charity. For me, this is the path that does not disappoint.

I thank you for the steps forward that you are taking under the guidance of the Spirit, and I trust that you will persevere courageously on the journey you have undertaken. I now invite you to pray, all together, for this intention in the words that the Lord has given us: Our Father...
