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Message of the Holy Father Francis to His Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch, on the occasion of the Feast of Saint Andrew

In the context of the traditional exchange of delegations for the respective feasts of the Patron Saints, on 29 June in Rome for the celebration of Saints Peter and Paul, and on 30 November in Istanbul for the celebration of Saint Andrew, Cardinal Kurt Koch, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, led the Holy See delegation for the feast of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The cardinal was accompanied by other superiors of the Dicastery, Bishop Brian Farrell, secretary, and Msgr. Andrea Palmieri, under-secretary. In Istanbul the apostolic nuncio in Turkey, Archbishop Marek Solczyński, joined the delegation.

The Holy See delegation took part in the solemn Divine Liturgy presided over by the Ecumenical Patriarch, His Holiness Bartholomew, in the patriarchal Church of Saint George in Phanar, and had a meeting with the Patriarch and conversations with the synodal Commission in charge of relations with the Catholic Church.

Cardinal Koch delivered a handwritten message from the Holy Father to the Ecumenical Patriarch, which was read publicly at the end of the Divine Liturgy.

The following is the text of the message:

Message of the Holy Father

*To His All Holiness Bartholomew
Archbishop of Constantinople
Ecumenical Patriarch*

Moved by heartfelt sentiments of fraternal affection, and mindful of the deep bonds of faith, hope and charity uniting the sister Churches of Rome and Constantinople, I send fervent good wishes to you, dear Brother in Christ, for the feast of the Apostle Saint Andrew, brother of Saint Peter and *protokletos*, heavenly patron and protector of the Church of Constantinople and the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

I likewise extend my greetings to the members of the Holy Synod, the clergy, monks and nuns and all the faithful gathered in the Patriarchal Church of Saint George on this solemn occasion.

Today's feast precedes the commemoration of a truly historic event: the meeting between Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in Jerusalem in January 1964. That encounter was a vital step forward in breaking down the barrier of misunderstanding, distrust and even hostility that had existed for almost a millennium. It is noteworthy that today we remember not so much the words and statements of those two prophetic Pastors, but above all their warm embrace. Indeed, it is highly significant that this journey of reconciliation, increasing closeness and overcoming of obstacles still impeding full visible communion, began with an embrace, a gesture that eloquently expresses the mutual recognition of ecclesial fraternity.

The example of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras shows us that all authentic paths to the restoration of full communion among the Lord's disciples are characterized by personal contact and time spent together. Moreover, through friendly dialogue, common prayer and joint action in service to humanity, especially those affected by poverty, violence, and exploitation, the members of the different Churches come to discover ever more deeply their shared trust in the loving providence of God the Father, their hope in the coming of the Kingdom inaugurated by Jesus Christ, and their common desire to exercise the virtue of charity inspired by the Holy Spirit.

With God's help, we have been able to continue along the path laid out by our Venerable Predecessors, renewing many times the joy of meeting and embracing each other. In this regard, I am especially pleased to recall our recent encounter in Rome, and I renew my gratitude for your participation in the Ecumenical Prayer Vigil held on the eve of the opening of the 16th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, dedicated to the theme: "For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission". Your personal support and that of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, expressed also through the participation of a fraternal delegate in the work of the Assembly, are a great source of encouragement for the fruitful continuation of the ongoing synodal process in the Catholic Church.

On this feast day of the Apostle Andrew, let us fervently pray to God, our merciful Father, that the clamour of arms, which brings only death and destruction, may cease, and that government and religious leaders may always seek the path of dialogue and reconciliation. May the holy Apostles Peter and Andrew intercede for all peoples and obtain for them the gifts of fraternal communion and peace.

Beloved brother in Christ, gladly renewing my most fervent good wishes, I exchange with you a fraternal embrace of peace in Christ our Lord.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 30 November 2023

FRANCIS
