The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO HIS HOLINESS BASELIOS MARTHOMA PAULOSE II
CATHOLICOS OF THE MALANKARA ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH

Thursday, 5 September 2013

Video

Your Holiness, dear Brothers in Christ,

It is a joy for me to meet Your Holiness and the distinguished delegation of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. Through you, I greet a Church that was founded upon the witness, even to martyrdom, that Saint Thomas gave to Our Lord Jesus Christ. The apostolic fraternity which united the first disciples in their service of the Gospel, today also unites our Churches, notwithstanding the many divisions that have arisen in the sometimes sad course of history, divisions which, thanks be to God, we are endeavouring to overcome in obedience to Lord's will and desire (cf. *Jn* 17:21).

The Apostle Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" (*Jn* 2:28) with one of the most beautiful confessions of faith in Christ handed down by the Gospels, a faith which proclaims the divinity of Christ, his lordship in our lives, and his victory over sin and death through his resurrection. This event is so real that Saint Thomas is invited to touch for himself the actual marks of the crucified and risen Jesus (cf. *Jn* 20:27). It is precisely in this faith that we meet each other; it is this faith that unites us, even if we cannot yet share the Eucharistic table; and it is this faith which urges us to continue and intensify the commitment to ecumenism, encounter and dialogue towards full communion. With deep affection I welcome Your Holiness and the members of your delegation and I ask you to convey my cordial greetings to the Bishops, clergy and faithful of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. I also greet to the communities you are visiting in Europe.

Thirty years ago, in June of 1983, Catholicos Moran Mar Baselios Marthoma Mathews I paid a visit to my venerable predecessor, Pope John Paul II and to the Church of Rome. Together, they recognised their common faith in Christ. Afterwards, they met again at Kottayam, in the Cathedral of Mar Elias, in February of 1986 during the pastoral visits of the Pope in India. On that occasion, Pope John Paul II said: “With you I desire that our Churches may soon find effective ways of resolving the urgent pastoral problems that face us, and that we may progress together in brotherly love and in our theological dialogue, for it is by these means that reconciliation among Christians and reconciliation in the world can come about. I can assure you that the Catholic Church, with the commitment she made at the Second Vatican Council, is ready to participate fully in this enterprise.”

From those encounters began a concrete path of dialogue with the institution of a mixed commission, which brought to birth the agreement of 1990, on the day of Pentecost, a commission which continues its important work and which has brought us to significant steps on themes such as the common use of buildings of worship and cemeteries, the mutual concession of spiritual and even liturgical resources in specific pastoral situations, and the necessity to identify new forms of collaboration when faced with growing social and religious challenges.

I wanted to recall some of the steps in these 30 years of the growing closeness between us, because I believe that on the ecumenical path it is important to look with trust to the steps that have been completed, overcoming prejudices and closed attitudes which are part of a kind of “culture of clashes” and source of division, and giving way to a "culture of encounter", which educates us for mutual understanding and for working towards unity. Alone however, this is impossible; our witnesses and poverty slow the progress. For this reason, it is important to intensify our prayer, because only the Holy Spirit with his grace, his light and his warmth can melt our coldness and guide our steps towards an ever greater brotherhood. Prayer and commitment in order to let relationships of friendship and cooperation grow at various levels, in the clergy, among the faithful, and among the various churches born from the witness given by St Thomas. May the Holy Spirit continue to enlighten us and guide us towards reconciliation and harmony, overcoming all causes of division and rivalry which have marked our past. Your Holiness, let us walk this path together, looking with trust towards that day in which, with the help of God, we will be united at the altar of Christ's sacrifice, in the fullness of Eucharistic communion.

Let us pray for one another, invoking the protection of Saint Peter and Saint Thomas upon all the flock that has been entrusted to our pastoral care. May they who worked together for the Gospel, intercede for us and accompany the journey of our Churches.

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