



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE DELEGATION OF THE
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE**

Friday, 30 June 2023

[Multimedia]

Your Eminence, dear Brothers,

With affection I greet each of you, the Members of the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, who have taken part in the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. I am grateful for your presence and I cordially thank His Holiness Bartholomew and the Holy Synod, who sent you among us. Through you, I send a warm greeting to my beloved Brother Bartholomew and to all the Bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

I wish before all else to express my joy for the good outcome of the Fifteenth Plenary Session of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, recently held in Alexandria of Egypt at the generous invitation of our dear Brother, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Greek Orthodox Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa. It was important to have engaged in a joint reading of the way in which the relationship between synodality and primacy developed in East and West during the second millennium. This can help us to move beyond the polemical arguments employed by both parties, arguments that might seem helpful for confirming our respective identities, but actually end up by focusing attention only on ourselves and on the past. Today, mindful of the lessons of history, we are called to seek together a modality of exercising the primacy that, within the context of synodality, is at the service of the Church's communion on the universal level. In this regard, a clarification is fitting: it cannot be thought that the same prerogatives that the Bishop of Rome enjoys with regard to his own Diocese and the Catholic community should be extended to the Orthodox communities. When, with the help of God, we shall be fully united in faith and love, the form in which the Bishop

of Rome will exercise his service of communion in the Church at the universal level will have to be the result of an inseparable relationship between primacy and synodality.

Let us never forget either, that full unity will be the gift of the Holy Spirit, and is to be sought in the Spirit. For communion between believers is not a matter of concessions and compromises, but of fraternal charity between brothers who acknowledge that they are beloved children of the Father and, filled with the Spirit of Christ, are capable of setting their diversity within a larger context. This is the perspective of the Holy Spirit, who harmonizes differences without making them uniform. We are called to adopt his outlook and hence to beg this insistently as a gift. Let us pray tirelessly to the Spirit; let us call upon him for one another! And let us share, as brothers, all those things that we bear in our hearts: our sorrows and joys, our hardships and hopes.

The fraternal nature of our meeting also leads us to share our concerns: including our overriding concern for peace, especially in war-torn Ukraine. It is a war that closely affects us; it demonstrates how all wars are in fact disasters, utter disasters: for peoples and families, for children and the elderly, for people forced to leave their country, for cities and villages, and for creation, as we have recently seen following the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam. As followers of Christ, we must not grow resigned to war but work together for peace. The tragic reality of this apparently interminable war requires a common creative effort on the part of all to envision and create paths of peace, in view of a just and stable peace. To be sure, peace is not something that we can attain by ourselves, but first and foremost a gift of the Lord. At the same time, it remains a gift that requires acceptance by men and women, particularly believers, who are called to share in God's work of peacemaking.

The Gospel shows us that peace is not born of the mere absence of war, but rises up from the human heart. What stands in the way of peace is ultimately the bitter root that we carry within us: greed, the selfish desire to pursue our own interests at the personal, community, national and even religious levels. For this reason, Jesus told us that the remedy is the conversion of hearts, renewing them with the love of the Father who "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (*Mt* 5:45). A gracious and universal love that is not confined to our own group. If our lives do not proclaim the newness of this love, how can we bear witness to Jesus before the world? Self-centred and self-seeking attitudes must be countered by God's own "style" which, as Christ taught us by his example, is one of service and self-renunciation. We can be sure that, by incarnating that style, Christians will grow in reciprocal communion and will assist our world, marked as it is by division and discord.

Dear Members of the Delegation, I assure you of my prayers for yourselves and for the Church that you represent here today. I ask the Lord that, through the intercession of Saints Peter and Paul, and Saint Andrew, brother of Peter, this encounter may be a further step along our journey towards visible unity in faith and love. I ask you, fraternally, to pray for me and for my ministry. Thank you.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana