



The Holy See

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

Friday, 28 June 2013

Dear Brother,

Dear Brothers in Christ, I am especially glad to offer you a warm welcome in the Church of Rome, as it celebrates the feast of its patron saints, Peter and Paul. Your presence on this occasion is a sign of the profound bond uniting the Church of Constantinople to the Church of Rome in faith, hope and charity. The fine custom of an exchange of delegations between our Churches for their respective patronal feasts, which started in 1969, gives me great joy: fraternal encounter is an essential part of the journey towards unity. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to His Holiness Bartholomaios I and to the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, who this year have chosen once again to send a high-ranking delegation. I recall with fraternal affection the exquisite gesture of His Holiness Bartholomaios I, in choosing to honour me with his presence at the celebration of the inauguration of my ministry as Bishop of Rome. I am sincerely grateful to Your Eminence too for your participation in that event, and I am pleased to welcome you again on this occasion. The search for unity among Christians is an urgent task – you have said that "it is not a luxury, but an imperative" – from which, today more than ever, we cannot prescind. In our world, which hungers and thirsts for truth, love, hope, peace and unity, our witness demands that we should at last be able to proclaim with one voice the good news of the Gospel and to celebrate together the Divine Mysteries of new life in Christ! We are well aware that unity is primarily a gift from God for which we must pray without ceasing, but we all have the task of preparing the conditions, cultivating the ground of our hearts, so that this great grace may be received. An essential contribution to the search for full communion between Catholics and Orthodox is offered by the Mixed International Commission for Theological Dialogue, co-chaired by Your Eminence, Metropolitan Ioannis, and my Venerable Brother Cardinal Kurt Koch. I thank you sincerely for your valued and tireless labour. This Commission has already produced many common texts and is now studying the delicate theme of the theological and ecclesiological relationship between

primacy and synodality in the Church's life. It is significant that today we are able to reflect together on these areas in truth and love, beginning from what we have in common, yet without concealing what still divides us. This is no mere theoretical exercise: it demands in-depth knowledge of one another's traditions in order to understand them and sometimes also to learn from them. I am speaking for example of Catholic Church's reflection on the meaning of episcopal collegiality and the tradition of synodality, so characteristic of the Orthodox Churches. I am confident that the effort to reflect together, complex and laborious though it is, will bear fruit in due course. I find it reassuring to know that Catholics and Orthodox share a notion of dialogue that is not about seeking a theological lowest common denominator on which to reach a compromise, but is rather about deepening our grasp of the sole truth that Christ has given to his Church, a truth that we never cease to understand better, as we follow the Holy Spirit's promptings. Hence, we must not be afraid of encounter and true dialogue. This does not lead us away from the truth; rather, through an exchange of gifts, it leads us, under the guidance of the Spirit of Truth, towards the whole Truth (cf. *Jn 16:13*). Venerable Brothers, I thank you once again for being here with us on the occasion of the feast of Saints Peter and Paul. Let us confidently invoke their intercession and that of Saint Andrew, Peter's brother, for our faithful and for the needs of the whole world, especially the poor, the suffering and those unjustly persecuted on account of their faith. I ask you, finally, to pray for me – I need your prayers – and to ask your people to pray for me, that the Lord may assist me in my ministry as Bishop of Rome and Successor of Peter.