



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS
TO HIS HOLINESS BARTHOLOMEW ON THE OCCASION
OF THE FEAST OF SAINT ANDREW,
PATRON SAINT OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE**

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

Your All Holiness, beloved brother in Christ,

The liturgical commemoration of the Apostle Andrew, patron of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, offers me a fitting opportunity, on behalf of the entire Catholic Church and in my own name, to express heartfelt good wishes to Your All Holiness, to the Members of the Holy Synod, to the clergy, to the monks and to all the faithful gathered in the Patriarchal Cathedral of Saint George in Phanar. I likewise send the assurance of my fervent prayers that God the Father, source of every gift, will grant you abundant heavenly blessings through the intercession of Saint Andrew, first among those called and the brother of Saint Peter. The delegation that I sent once again this year shows the fraternal affection and the deep respect that I continue to have for Your All Holiness and for the Church entrusted to your pastoral care.

Just a few days ago, 21 November, was the sixtieth anniversary of the promulgation of the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, which marked the Catholic Church's official entry into the ecumenical movement. This important document of the Second Vatican Council opened the way for dialogue with other Churches. Our dialogue with the Orthodox Church has been and continues to be particularly fruitful. The first of the fruits obtained is certainly the renewed fraternity that we experience today with particular intensity, and for this I give thanks to God the Almighty Father. However, what *Unitatis Redintegratio* sets forth as the ultimate goal of dialogue, full communion among all Christians, sharing in the one Eucharistic chalice, has not yet been realized even with our Orthodox brothers and sisters. This is not surprising, for divisions dating back a millennium, cannot be resolved within a few decades. At the same time, as some theologians maintain, the goal of re-establishing full communion has an undeniable eschatological dimension inasmuch as

the path to unity coincides with that of the salvation already given in Jesus Christ, in which the Church will fully participate only at the end of time. This is not to say that we should lose sight of the ultimate goal for which we all yearn, nor can we lose hope that this unity can be achieved in the course of history and within a reasonable time. Catholics and Orthodox must never cease to pray and work together to dispose ourselves to accept the divine gift of unity.

The Catholic Church's irreversible commitment to the path of dialogue was reaffirmed by the recent Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, held at the Vatican from 2 to 27 October 2024. The impetus for a renewed exercise of synodality in the Catholic Church will certainly foster relations between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, which has always kept this constitutive ecclesial dimension alive. Beyond the concrete decisions that will flow from the work of the Assembly, an atmosphere of authentic and frank dialogue was experienced during those days. In a world torn by opposition and polarization, the participants in the Assembly, despite coming from very different backgrounds, were able to listen to each other without judging or condemning. Listening without condemning should also be the manner in which Catholics and Orthodox continue their journey towards unity. I am especially pleased that representatives from other Churches, including Metropolitan Job of Pisidia, a delegate of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, actively participated in the synodal process. His presence and assiduous work was enriching for all and a tangible sign of the attention and support that you have always given to the synod process.

Your All Holiness, the now imminent 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea will be another opportunity to bear witness to the growing communion that already exists among all who are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. I have already expressed several times my desire to be able to celebrate this event together with you, and I sincerely thank all those who have already begun working to make that possible. This anniversary will concern not only the ancient Sees that took part actively in the Council, but all Christians who continue to profess their faith in the words of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. The remembrance of that important event will surely strengthen the bonds that already exist and encourage all Churches to a renewed witness in today's world. The fraternity lived and the witness given by Christians will also be a message for our world plagued by war and violence. In this regard, I willingly unite myself to your prayer that there may be peace in Ukraine, Palestine, Israel and in Lebanon, and in all those regions where there is being fought what I have often called a "piecemeal world war".

With these sentiments, I renew my heartfelt good wishes to Your All Holiness. Entrusting you to the intercession of the Holy Brothers Peter and Andrew, I exchange with you a fraternal embrace in Christ our Lord.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 30 November 2024

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