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The Pope receives a delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople: united by the experience of God's mercy

Vatican City, 28 June 2016 – As usual, on the occasion of the festivity of Sts. Peter and Paul, patrons of the Church of Rome, the Pope received in the Vatican a visit from a delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, led by Methodios, Metropolitan of Boston, accompanied by Archbishop Job of Telmessos and the Reverend Patriarchal Deacon Nephon Tsimalis. The Roman Church will respond with a visit to the Patriarchate on the day of its patron saint, St. Andrew.

In his address to the representatives of Constantinople, the Holy Father emphasised the importance of the experience of forgiveness and grace, which unites all believers in Christ, and of theological dialogue which helps overcome the obstacles that prevent Christians from recovering the unity experienced in the first millennium.

"From the earliest centuries, there have been many differences between the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople, in the liturgical sphere, in ecclesiastical discipline and also in the manner of formulating the one revealed truth", observed Francis. "However, beyond the concrete shapes that our Churches have taken on over time, there has always been the same experience of God's infinite love for our smallness and frailty, and the same calling to bear witness to this love before the world. Acknowledging that the experience of God's mercy is the bond uniting us means that we must increasingly make mercy the criterion and measure of our relationship. If, as Catholics and Orthodox, we wish to proclaim together the marvels of God's mercy to the whole world, we cannot continue to harbour sentiments and attitudes of rivalry, mistrust and rancour. For divine mercy frees us of the burden of past conflicts and lets us be open to the future to which the Spirit is guiding us".

Noting that the unity shared in the first millennium "was never uniformity but always communion with respect for legitimate diversities", the Pope went on to express to the Metropolitan Methodius his appreciation for the work accomplished by the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, of which he is co-president. Instituted more than fifty years ago, this Consultation has proposed significant reflections on central theological issues for the Churches, thus fostering the development of good relations between Catholics and Orthodox on the continent. In this regard, Francis announced that the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church will meet again in September. He also offered special remembrance in his prayers for Archbishop Job, appointed as the Orthodox co-president of the Commission, and expressed his profound gratitude to Metropolitan Ioannis of Pergamum, who has long carried out this

delicate task with dedication and competence.

The Holy Father also mentioned his encounter last April with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the Archbishop of Athens and of All Greece, His Beatitude Ieronymos II, on the Island of Lesbos, where they met with refugees and migrants. "Seeing the despair on the faces of men, women and children uncertain of their future, listening helplessly as they related their experiences, and praying on the shore of the sea that has claimed the lives of so many innocent persons, was a tremendously moving experience. It made clear how much still needs to be done to ensure dignity and justice for so many of our brothers and sisters", he said. "A great consolation in that sad experience was the powerful spiritual and human closeness that I shared with Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Ieronymos. Led by the Holy Spirit, we are coming to realise ever more clearly that we, Catholics and Orthodox, have a shared responsibility towards those in need, based on our obedience to the one Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. Taking up this task together is a duty linked to the very credibility of our Christian identity. Consequently, I encourage every form of cooperation between Catholics and Orthodox in concrete undertakings in service to suffering humanity".

Finally, the Pope spoke about the recently concluded Pan-Orthodox Council in which Cardinal Koch and Msgr. Farrell participated on behalf of the Catholic Church as fraternal observers, and asked that the Holy Spirit "bring forth from this event abundant fruits for the good of the Church".
