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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Audience with the Members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches

At 10.45 this morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers,

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (*Ps* 133:1). With these words of the Psalm, I offer you my cordial welcome and I thank you for your commitment to walking along the paths of unity, and for doing so in a spirit of fraternity! I am pleased, every second year, to welcome you to Rome on the occasion of your dialogue which last year was held in the See of Holy Etchmiadzin at the invitation of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Through you, I extend my greetings to my venerable and dear Brothers, Heads of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. I am grateful for the kind words of His Grace Bishop Kyrillos, the new Co-President of the Commission, whom I assure of my prayers and best wishes for his work. With gratitude, I also remember his predecessor, beloved Metropolitan Anba Bishoy, who was the first Co-President and who recently passed away. I join you in praying for him.

At the conclusion of your work this week, the sixteenth session of your Commission, we can together thank the Lord for the fruits already gathered along the way. Your dialogue expresses well how, between the East and the West, the "various theological expressions are to be considered often as mutually complementary rather than conflicting" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 17), as affirmed by the Second Vatican Council, whose sixtieth anniversary of its announcement we celebrated a few days ago. I offer my prayer and encouragement that your current reflection on the Sacraments may help us to continue the journey towards full communion, towards the shared celebration of the Holy Eucharist. You have dedicated this session to reflecting on the Sacrament of Matrimony. I

like to recall what the book of Genesis says about this: “God created man in his own image… male and female he created them” (*Gen* 1:27). Man is fully in the image of God not when he is alone, but when he lives in a stable communion of love, because God is a communion of love. I am certain that your work, carried out in an atmosphere of great harmony, will be to the benefit of the family of God’s children, the Spouse of Christ, who we desire to present to the Lord “without spot or wrinkle” (*Eph* 5:27), without wounds and without divisions, but in the beauty of full communion.

Many of you belong to the Churches of the Middle East which have suffered terribly as a result of war, violence and persecution. As I meet you here, I recall the recent meeting in Bari which brought us together as Heads of Churches for a deeply intense day of prayer and reflection on the situation in the Middle East, an experience, I hope, which may be repeated. I want to assure all the faithful in the Middle East of my closeness, my constant thoughts and my prayers that this land, unique in God’s salvific plan, may, after the long night of conflict, witness the dawn of peace. The Middle East must become a *land of peace*, it cannot continue to be *a land of hostility*. May war, the daughter of power and destitution, give way to peace, the daughter of law and justice and may our Christian brothers and sisters be recognized as full citizens enjoying equal rights (cf. *Address at the Conclusion of the Dialogue*, Bari, 7 July 2018).

The lives of many saints of our Churches are seeds of peace sown in those lands; they are now blossoming in heaven. From there they support us on our journey to full communion, a journey that God desires, a journey that summons us to walk, not according to fleeting convenience, but on the path of openness to the Lord’s will: that “all may be one” (*Jn* 17:21). He calls us, ever increasingly, to a coherent witness of life and to an authentic pursuit of unity. The seed of this communion, thanks also to your important work, has blossomed and continues to be watered by the blood of the *witnesses of unity*, by so much blood shed by the martyrs of our time: members of different Churches who, united by the same suffering for the name of Jesus, now share the same glory.

Dear Brothers, as I renew my heartfelt gratitude for your visit, counting on the intercession of these martyrs, I invoke upon you and your ministry the blessing of the Lord. And now, if agreeable to you, we can pray the Our Father, each in our own language.