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Audience with a delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate on the occasion of the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, on the occasion of the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, to whom he addressed the following words:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Eminence, dear brothers!

I welcome you and I am grateful for your visit [and your kind words]. Yesterday you took part in the feast of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul: your presence at the Eucharistic liturgy was a source of great joy for me and for all present, for it visibly manifested the closeness and fraternal charity of the Church of Constantinople towards the Church of Rome. I ask you to convey my greetings and my gratitude to my dear brother Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch, and to the Holy Synod, who sent you to be here with us.

The traditional exchange of delegations between our Churches for the celebration of our respective patronal feasts is a tangible sign that the days of distance and indifference, when our divisions were considered irreparable, is long past. Today, thank God, in obedience to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our Churches are engaged in a fraternal and fruitful dialogue and are committed in a convinced and irreversible way to advancing towards the restoration of full communion.

In this regard, I think with gratitude of those who initiated this process. In particular, I gladly recall, as the fiftieth anniversary of his death approaches, the unforgettable Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, a wise and courageous pastor who continues to be a source of inspiration for me and for many others. It was he, who spoke of "Sister Churches, Brother Peoples".

Sister Churches, Brother Peoples. Reconciliation among separated Christians, as a means of contributing to

peace between peoples in conflict, is a most timely consideration these days, as our world is disrupted by a cruel and senseless war of aggression in which many, many Christians are fighting one another. Before the scandal of war, in the first place, our concern must not be for talking and discussing, but for *weeping*, for *helping* others and for *experiencing conversion* ourselves. We need to weep for the victims and the overwhelming bloodshed, the deaths of so many innocent people, the trauma inflicted on families, cities and an entire people. How much suffering has been endured by those who have lost their loved ones and been forced to abandon their homes and their own country! We need to help these, our brothers and sisters. We are summoned to exercise that charity which, as Christians, we are obliged to show towards Jesus, present in the displaced, the poor and the wounded. But we also need to experience conversion, and to recognize that armed conquest, expansionism and imperialism have nothing to do with the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed. Nothing to do with the risen Lord, who in Gethsemane told his disciples to reject violence, to put the sword back in its place, since those who live by the sword will die by the sword (*Mt 26:52*), and who, cutting short every objection, simply said: "Enough!" (cf. *Lk 22:51*).

Sister Churches, Brother Peoples. Seeking Christian unity is not merely a question internal to the Churches. It is an essential condition for the realization of an authentic universal fraternity, manifested in justice and solidarity towards all. It thus calls for serious reflection on the part of us Christians. What kind of world do we want to emerge in the wake of this terrible outbreak of hostilities and conflict? And what contribution are we prepared to make even now towards a more fraternal humanity? As believers, we must necessarily find the answers to these questions in the Gospel: in Jesus, who calls us to be merciful and never violent, to be perfect as the Father is perfect, and not be conformed to the world (cf. *Mt 5:48*). Let us help one another, dear brothers, not to yield to the temptation to muffle the explosive newness of the Gospel with the seductions of this world. And not to turn the Father of all, "who makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (cf. v. 45), into the god of our own ideas and our own nations. Christ is our peace. By his incarnation, death and resurrection for all, he has torn down the walls of enmity and division between people (cf. *Eph 2:14*). Let us start anew from him, and recognize that it is no longer the time to order our ecclesial agendas in accordance with the world's standards of power and expediency, but in accordance with the Gospel's bold prophetic message of peace. With humility and much prayer, but also with courage and *parrhesía*.

One sign of hope, in the journey towards the restoration of full communion, comes from the meeting of the Coordinating Committee of the *Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and Orthodox Church*, which, after an interruption of two years due to the pandemic, took place last May. Through you, dear Eminence, as the Orthodox Co-President of the Commission, I would like to thank His Eminence Eugenios, Archbishop of Crete, and His Eminence Prodromos, Metropolitan of Rethymno, for the generous and fraternal hospitality offered to the members of the Committee. It is my hope that the theological dialogue will progress by promoting a new mentality that, conscious of the errors of the past, can help us to look together to the present and future, without letting ourselves be trapped in the prejudices of the past. Let us not be content with an "ecclesiastical diplomacy" that would allow us to politely maintain our own points of view, but instead journey together as brothers. Let us pray for one another, work with one another and support one another by looking to Jesus and his Gospel. In this way, the newness that God brings will not be held hostage to the conduct of the "old man" (cf. *Eph 4:22-24*).

Dear members of the Delegation. May the holy brothers Peter and Andrew intercede for us and obtain the blessing of God, the Good Father, upon our journey together and upon the entire world. I thank you most heartily and I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me and for my ministry.
