



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO HIS HOLINESS BARTHOLOMEW I, ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH
ON THE OCCASION OF THE SOLEMNITY
OF THE HOLY APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL
FOR THE OPENING OF THE PAULINE YEAR**

Saturday, 28 June 2008

Your Holiness,

With profound and sincere joy I greet you and the distinguished entourage that has accompanied you and I am pleased to do so with the words taken from the Second Letter of St Peter: "To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (1: 1-2). The celebration of Sts Peter and Paul, Patrons of the Church of Rome as that of St Andrew Patron of the Church of Constantinople, annually offers us the possibility of an exchange of Visits, which are always important opportunities for brotherly conversations and common moments of prayer. Thus our mutual personal knowledge grows: projects are harmonized and hope increases, which enlivens us all, that we may soon achieve full unity, in obedience to the Lord's mandate.

This year, here in Rome, in addition to the patronal Feast, is the happy circumstance of the inauguration of the Pauline Year which I have desired to institute in order to commemorate the second millennium of St Paul's birth, with the intention of promoting an ever deeper reflection on the theological and spiritual inheritance bequeathed to the Church by the Apostle to the Gentiles with his vast and profound work of evangelization. I learned with pleasure that you too, Your Holiness, have instituted a Pauline Year. This felicitous circumstance highlights the roots of our common Christian vocation and the meaningful harmony, which we are living, of sentiments and pastoral commitments. For this I give thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ who is guiding our steps towards unity with the power of his Spirit.

St Paul reminds us that full communion among all Christians is founded on "one Lord, one faith, one Baptism" (Eph 4: 5). May our common faith, the one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and obedience to the one Lord and Saviour, therefore, be fully expressed in the community and ecclesial dimensions as soon as possible. "One body and one Spirit", the Apostle to the Gentiles says, and he adds: "just as you were called to the one hope" (Eph 4: 4). St Paul also points out to us a reliable way to preserve unity, and in the case of division, to restore it. The Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council took Paul's suggestion and represented it in the context of ecumenical commitment, referring to the rich and ever timely words of the Letter to the Ephesians: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4: 1-3).

St Paul was not afraid to address a strong appeal to the Christians of Corinth among whom disputes had arisen, so that they might be unanimous in their speech, that the dissensions among them disappear and that they foster perfect union of thought and intention (cf. 1 Cor 1: 10). In our world, in which the phenomenon of globalization is being consolidated but where divisions and conflicts continue to persist, men and women feel increasingly the need for certainties and peace. At the same time, however, they are bewildered and, as it were, enticed by a certain hedonistic and relativistic culture which casts doubt even on the existence of the truth. In this regard, the Apostle's instructions are particularly favourable for encouraging the efforts to seek full unity among all Christians, so necessary to offer the people of the third millennium an ever more luminous witness of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Only in Christ and in his Gospel can humanity find a response to its deepest expectations.

May the Pauline Year, which will solemnly begin this evening, help the Christian people to renew their ecumenical commitment and may our common initiatives on the way towards communion among all Christ's disciples be intensified. Your presence here today is certainly an encouraging sign of this process. For this reason I once again express my joy to you all, while together we raise our grateful prayer to the Lord.