



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF ORTHODOX AND CATHOLIC BISHOPS FROM THE UNITED
STATES AND CANADA**

*Hall of the Throne
Tuesday, 28 November 1995*

Dear Brothers in Christ,

I am happy to have this opportunity to meet the members of the *Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops from the United States and Canada*. Your pilgrimage together, bringing you now to the Church of Rome and shortly to the Church of Constantinople, indicates your deep desire to advance the search for the full communion which our Churches are committed to achieving on the path of mutual respect, dialogue and love.

In a few days time it will be 30 years since Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Atenagoras I, on 7 December 1965, in a common Declaration asked the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches to erase from memory the sentences of excommunication delivered against one another in 1054. That Declaration "was at once a healing of historical memories, a mutual forgiveness, and a firm commitment to strive for communion" (John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 52).

How great is the Lord, and how glorious his name, that he enables us to see how far we have travelled in the three decades since that turning-point! When His Holiness Bartholomew I visited Rome in June of this year, we recalled in our Common Declaration that the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue was able to state that we recognize one another as "Sister Churches, responsible together for safeguarding the one Church of God" (Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue, *Communis Delaratio*, 2 [29 June 1995]). We rejoice in the knowledge that we share a common sacramental conception of the Church, "sustained and passed on in time by the apostolic succession" (*Ibid.*).

Dear Brothers, as you visit the tomb of the Apostle Peter here in Rome, may God grant you the grace of perseverance in the quest for unity. As you visit the Church of Constantinople, filled with

the memory of the Apostle Andrew, may the Lord grant you the courage to continue to build upon the relationships developed thus far.

As the Year 2000 approaches, may the figures of the Brothers Peter and Andrew, united too in their martyrdom for the sake of the Gospel, inspire us all to love the Church with undivided hearts. May the Apostles intercede for us that we may seek only the will of Christ, our Lord and Master, who prayed for his disciples "that they may all be one... so that the world may believe" (Jn. 17:21).

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:2).

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