

## **POPE TO FRATERNAL DELEGATES: YOUR PRESENCE IS A TANGIBLE SIGN OF COOPERATION FOR COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY**

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Early this afternoon in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, Pope Francis received fraternal delegates, that is, representative envoys of Churches, Ecclesial Communities, and international ecumenical organizations, as well as representatives of non-Christian Religions, who have come to Rome for the inauguration of his ministry as Bishop of Rome and successor of the Apostle Peter.

On behalf of those present, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, greeted the Pope, recalling the “elevated, serious, and difficult task” that his ministry bears with it. He also reiterated the need for the Churches to shun worldly distractions and to work on the unity between Christians.

Francis, who listened to the words of the Patriarch seated on an armchair rather than the throne that is customarily used in the Clementine Hall, thanked Bartholomew I, calling him “my brother Andrew”, since the patriarchs of Constantinople are considered the successors of the Apostle Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. He then said that, thanks to the presence at yesterday's Mass of representatives of the various communities, he felt “in an even stronger way, the prayer for unity among the believers in Christ and [glimpsed] prefigured in some way, its full realization, which depends on God's plan and our sincere cooperation.”

“I begin my apostolic ministry,” he continued, “in this year that my venerated predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, with a truly inspired intuition, proclaimed the Year of Faith for the Catholic Church. With this initiative, which I wish to continue and which I hope serves as a stimulus for each of us in our journey of faith, he wanted to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, proposing a type of pilgrimage to what is essential for every Christian: a personal and transforming relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died and rose again for our salvation. The heart of the Council's message lies precisely in the desire to proclaim this ever-valid treasure of the faith to the persons of our time.”

Francis then recalled the image and words of Pope John XXIII at the opening of the Council: “The Catholic Church considers it her duty to actively work so as to bring about the great mystery of that unity for which Jesus Christ prayed so ardently to His Father in heaven on the eve of his sacrifice.” He continued saying: “Yes, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we all feel intimately joined in our Saviour's prayer at the Last Supper, to his call: 'ut unum sint'. Let us call on our merciful Father that we may fully live that faith that we received as a gift on the day of our Baptism and to be able to witness to it freely, joyfully, and courageously. This will be the best way we can serve the cause of unity among Christians, a service of hope for a world that is still marked by divisions, differences, and rivalries.”

“For my part, I wish to assure you, following in the path of my predecessors, of my firm will to continue on the path of ecumenical dialogue ... I ask you to take my cordial greetings and assurance of my remembrance in the Lord Jesus to the Churches and Christian Communities that you represent here. I also ask of you the kindness of a special prayer for myself, so that I might be a Pastor in harmony with Christ's heart.”

Then, addressing the representatives of the Jewish communities, he emphasized “the very special spiritual bond” that they have with Christians. Quoting the Vatican II declaration *Nostra Aetate*, he said: “The Church of Christ acknowledges that ... the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets.’ ... I am confident that, with the help of the Almighty, we can profitably continue that fraternal dialogue that the Council hoped for and that has been carried out, bearing not few fruits, especially over the last few decades.”

The Pope then greeted those belonging to other religious traditions, first of all the Muslims who “adore the one, living, and merciful God and who call upon Him in prayer.” Then, addressing all those gathered, he said: “I really appreciate your presence. In it I see a tangible sign of the desire to grow in mutual respect and cooperation for the common good of humanity.”

“The Catholic Church is aware of the importance of the promotion of friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions. I want to repeat this: the promotion of friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions.”.. The Church “is also aware of the responsibility that we all bear to this our world, to all of creation, which we should love and protect. And we can do much for the good of the poorest, of the weak and suffering, to promote justice and reconciliation, to build peace. But, above all, we must keep alive the thirst for the Absolute in the world, not allowing a one-dimensional vision of the human person, in which humanity is reduced to that which it produces and consumes, to prevail. This is one of the most dangerous pitfalls of our times.”

“We know how, in recent times, violence has produced an attempt to eliminate God and the divine from the horizon of humanity, and we feel the value of witnessing in our societies to the original openness to the transcendent that is inscribed in the human heart. In this, we also feel close to all men and women who, although not claiming to belong to any religious tradition, still feel themselves to be in search of truth, goodness, and beauty, God's Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, and who are our precious allies in the effort to defend human dignity, in building a peaceful coexistence between peoples, and in carefully protecting creation.”