

BARTHOLOMEW I: WITNESSING TOGETHER TO THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

Vatican City, 11 October 2012 (VIS) - During the course of this morning's ceremony in St. Peter's Square for the opening of the Year of Faith, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I pronounced an address, extracts of which are given below.

"Fifty years ago in this very square, a powerful and pivotal celebration captured the heart and mind of the Roman Catholic Church, transporting it across the centuries into the contemporary world. This transforming milestone, the opening of Vatican Council II, was inspired by the fundamental reality that the Son and incarnate Logos of God is 'where two or three are gathered in his name' and that the Spirit, Who proceeds from the Father, 'will guide us into the whole truth'.

"Over the last five decades, the achievements of this assembly have been diverse as evidenced through the series of important and influential constitutions, declarations, and decrees. We have contemplated the renewal of the spirit and the 'return to the sources' through liturgical study, biblical research, and patristic scholarship. We have appreciated the struggle toward gradual liberation from the limitation of rigid scholasticism to the openness of ecumenical encounter, which has led to the mutual rescinding of the excommunications of the year 1054, the exchange of greetings, returning of relics, entering into important dialogues, and visiting each other in our respective Sees.

"Our journey has not always been easy or without pain and challenge. ... The essential theology and principal themes of Vatican Council II - the mystery of the Church, the sacredness of the liturgy, and the authority of the bishop - are difficult to apply in earnest practice, and constitute a life-long and Church-wide labour to assimilate".

"As we move forward together, we offer thanks and glory to the living God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - that the same assembly of bishops has recognised the importance of reflection and sincere dialogue between our 'sister Churches'. We join in the 'hope that the barrier dividing the Eastern Church and the Western Church will be removed, and that - at last - there may be but the one dwelling, firmly established on Christ Jesus, the Cornerstone, Who will make both one'".

"Our presence here signifies and seals our commitment to witness together to the Gospel message of salvation and healing for the least of our brethren: the poor, the oppressed, the forgotten in God's world. Let us begin with prayers for peace and healing for our Christian brothers and sisters living in the Middle East. In the current turmoil of violence, separation, and brokenness that is escalating between peoples and nations, may the love and desire for harmony we profess here, and the understanding we seek through dialogue and mutual respect, serve as a model for our world. Indeed, may all humanity reach out to 'the other' and work together to

overcome the suffering of people everywhere, particularly in the face of famine, natural disasters, disease, and war that ultimately touches all of our lives.

"In light of all that has yet to be accomplished by the Church on earth, and with great appreciation for all the progress we have shared, we are, therefore, honoured to be invited to attend - and humbled to be called to address - this solemn and festive commemoration of Vatican Council II. It is fitting that this occasion also marks for your Church the formal inauguration of the 'Year of Faith', as it is faith that provides a visible sign of the journey we have travelled together along the path of reconciliation and visible unity".

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