



# The Holy See

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**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO HIS HOLINESS BARTHOLOMAIOS I  
ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE, ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH**

*Your Holiness,*

It is with great joy that I address Your Holiness on the occasion of the visit of the delegation guided by my Venerable Brother Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the [Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity](#), to whom I have entrusted the task of conveying to you my warmest fraternal greetings on the Feast of Saint Andrew, the brother of Saint Peter and the protector of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

On this joyful occasion commemorating the birth into eternal life of the Apostle Andrew, whose witness of faith in the Lord culminated in his martyrdom, I express also my respectful remembrance to the Holy Synod, the clergy and all the faithful, who under your pastoral care and guidance continue even in difficult circumstances to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The memory of the holy martyrs compels all Christians to bear witness to their faith before the world. There is an urgency in this call especially in our own day, in which Christianity is faced with increasingly complex challenges. The witness of Christians will surely be all the more credible if all believers in Christ are "of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32).

Our Churches have committed themselves sincerely over the last decades to pursuing the path towards the re-establishment of full communion, and although we have not yet reached our goal, many steps have been taken that have enabled us to deepen the bonds between us. Our growing friendship and mutual respect, and our willingness to encounter one another and to recognize one another as brothers in Christ, should not be hindered by those who remain bound to the remembrance of historical differences, which impedes their openness to the Holy Spirit who guides the Church and is able to transform all human failings into opportunities for good.

This openness has guided the work of the [Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue](#), which held its eleventh plenary session in Cyprus last month. The meeting was marked by a spirit of solemn purpose and a warm sentiment of closeness. I extend once again my heartfelt gratitude to the Church of Cyprus for its most generous welcome and hospitality. It is a source of great encouragement that despite some difficulties and misunderstandings all the Churches involved in the International Commission have expressed their intention to continue the dialogue.

The theme of the plenary session, *The Role of the Bishop of Rome in the Communion of the Church in the First Millennium*, is certainly complex, and will require extensive study and patient dialogue if we are to aspire to a shared integration of the traditions of East and West. The Catholic Church understands the Petrine ministry as a gift of the Lord to His Church. This ministry should not be interpreted in the perspective of power, but within an ecclesiology of communion, as a service to unity in truth and charity. The Bishop of the Church of Rome, which presides in charity (Saint Ignatius of Antioch), is understood to be the *Servus Servorum Dei* (Saint Gregory the Great). Thus, as my venerable predecessor the Servant of God Pope [John Paul II](#) wrote and I reiterated on the occasion of [my visit to the Phanar in November 2006](#), it is a question of seeking together, inspired by the model of the first millennium, the forms in which the ministry of the Bishop of Rome may accomplish a service of love recognized by one and all (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 95). Let us therefore ask God to bless us and may the Holy Spirit guide us along this difficult yet promising path.

Yet even as we make this journey towards full communion, we should already offer common witness by working together in the service of humanity, especially in defending the dignity of the human person, in affirming fundamental ethical values, in promoting justice and peace, and in responding to the suffering that continues to afflict our world, particularly hunger, poverty, illiteracy, and the inequitable distribution of resources.

Furthermore, our Churches can work together in drawing attention to humanity's responsibility for the safeguarding of creation. In this regard, I express once again my appreciation for the many valuable initiatives supported and encouraged by Your Holiness which have borne witness to the gift of creation. The recent international symposium on *Religion, Science and the Environment* dedicated to the Mississippi River, and your encounters in the United States with distinguished figures from the political, cultural and religious spheres, have exemplified your commitment.

Your Holiness, on the solemn Feast of the great Apostle Andrew, I express my respectful esteem and spiritual closeness to Your Holiness and to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and I pray that the Triune God may bestow abundant blessings of grace and light on your lofty ministry for the good of the Church.

It is with these sentiments that I extend to you a fraternal embrace in the name of our one Lord Jesus Christ, and I renew my prayer that the peace and grace of our Lord may be with Your

Holiness and with all those entrusted to your eminent pastoral leadership.

*From the Vatican, 25 November 2009*

**BENEDICT XVI**

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