



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO EGYPT

(28-29 APRIL 2017)

COURTESY VISIT TO H.H. POPE TAWADROS II

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Cairo

Friday, 28 April 2017

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The Lord is risen, he is truly risen! [*Al Massih kam, bilhakika kam!*]

Your Holiness,

Dear Brother,

Only a short time has passed since the [great Solemnity of Easter](#), the heart of the Christian life, which we were blessed this year to celebrate on the same day. We thus joined in proclaiming the Easter message and, in a sense, relived the experience of the first disciples who together “rejoiced when they saw the Lord” that day (*Jn 20:20*). This paschal joy is today made all the more precious by the gift of our joining to worship the Risen One in prayer and by our renewed exchange, in his name, of the holy kiss and embrace of peace. For this, I am deeply grateful: in coming here as a pilgrim, I was sure of receiving the blessing of a brother who awaited me. I have eagerly looked forward to this new meeting, for I vividly recall [the visit Your Holiness made to Rome](#) shortly after my election, on 10 May 2013. That date has happily become the occasion for celebrating an annual *Day of Friendship between Copts and Catholics*.

As we joyfully progress on our ecumenical journey, I wish particularly to recall that milestone in relations between the Sees of Peter and Mark which is the *Common Declaration* signed by our predecessors more than forty years ago, on 10 May 1973. After “centuries of difficult history” marked by increasing “theological differences, nourished and widened by non-theological factors”, and growing mistrust, we were able that day, with God’s help, to acknowledge together that Christ is “perfect God with respect to his divinity and perfect man with respect to his humanity” (*Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III*, 10 May 1973). Yet equally important and timely are the words that immediately precede this statement, in which we acknowledge Jesus Christ as “our Lord and God and Saviour and King”. With these words, the See of Mark and the See of Peter proclaimed the lordship of Jesus: together we confessed that we belong to Jesus and that he is *our all*.

What is more, we realized that, because we belong to him, we can no longer think that each can go his own way, for that would betray his will that his disciples “all be one... so that the world may believe” (*Jn 17:21*). In the sight of God, who wishes us to be “perfectly one” (v. 23), it is no longer possible to take refuge behind the pretext of differing interpretations, much less of those centuries of history and traditions that estranged us one from the other. In the words of *His Holiness John Paul II*, “there is no time to lose in this regard! Our communion in the one Lord Jesus Christ, in the one Holy Spirit and in one baptism already represents a deep and fundamental reality” (*Address at the Ecumenical Meeting*, 25 February 2000). Consequently, not only is there an ecumenism of gestures, words and commitment, but *an already effective communion* that grows daily in living relation with the Lord Jesus, is rooted in the faith we profess and is truly grounded on our baptism and our being made a “new creation” (cf. *2 Cor 5:17*) in him. In a word, there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (*Eph 4:5*). Hence, we constantly set out anew, in order to hasten that eagerly awaited day when we will be in full and visible communion around the altar of the Lord.

In this exciting journey, which – like life itself – is not always easy and straightforward, but on which the Lord exhorts us to persevere, we are not alone. We are accompanied by a great host of saints and martyrs who, already fully one, impel us here below to be a living image of the “Jerusalem above” (*Gal 4:26*). Among them, surely Peter and Mark in particular rejoice in our encounter today. Great is the bond uniting them. We need only think of the fact that Saint Mark put at the heart of his Gospel Peter’s profession of faith: “You are the Christ”. It was the answer to Jesus ever urgent question: “But who do you say that I am?” (*Mk 8:29*). Today too, many people cannot answer this question; there are even few people who can raise it, and above all few who can answer it with the joy of knowing Jesus, that same joy with which we have the grace of confessing him together.

Together, then, we are called to bear witness to him, to carry our faith to the world, especially in the way it is meant to be brought: by living it, so that Jesus’ presence can be communicated with life and speak the language of gratuitous and concrete love. As Coptic Orthodox and Catholics, we can always join in speaking this common language of charity: before undertaking a charitable

work, we would do well to ask if we can do it together with our brothers and sisters who share our faith in Jesus. Thus, by building communion in the concreteness of a daily lived witness, the Spirit will surely open providential and unexpected paths to unity.

It is with this constructive apostolic spirit that Your Holiness continues to show a genuine and fraternal attention for the Coptic Catholic Church. I am most grateful for this closeness, which has found praiseworthy expression in the *National Council of Christian Churches*, which you have established so that believers in Jesus can work together more closely for the benefit of Egyptian society as a whole. I also greatly appreciated the generous hospitality offered to the thirteenth Meeting of the *International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches*, which took place here last year at your invitation. It is a promising sign that the following meeting took place this year in Rome, as if to bespeak a particular continuity between the Sees of Mark and Peter.

In the sacred Scriptures, Peter seems in some way to reciprocate the affection of Mark by calling him “my son” (*1 Pet 5:13*). But the Evangelist and his apostolic activity are also fraternally associated with Saint Paul, who, before dying a martyr in Rome, mentions Mark’s great usefulness in his ministry (cf. *2 Tim 4:11*) and speaks of him frequently (cf. *Philem 24; Col 4:10*). *Fraternal charity and communion in mission*: these are the messages that the word of God and our own origins have bequeathed to us. They are the evangelical seeds that we rejoice to water together and, with God’s help, to make grow (cf. *1 Cor 3:6-7*).

The deepening progress of our ecumenical journey is also sustained, in mysterious and quite relevant way, by a genuine *ecumenism of blood*. Saint John tells us that Jesus came “with water and blood” (*1 Jn 5:6*); whoever believes in him thus “overcomes the world” (*1 Jn 5:5*). With water and blood: by living a new life in our common baptism, a life of love always and for all, even at the cost of the sacrifice of one’s life. How many martyrs in this land, from the first centuries of Christianity, have lived their faith heroically to the end, shedding their blood rather than denying the Lord and yielding to the enticements of evil, or merely to the temptation of repaying evil with evil! The venerable *Martyrology of the Coptic Church* bears eloquent witness to this. Even in recent days, tragically, the innocent blood of defenceless Christians was cruelly shed: their innocent blood unites us. Most dear brother, just as the heavenly Jerusalem is one, so too is our martyrology; your sufferings are also our sufferings. Strengthened by this witness, let us strive to oppose violence by preaching and sowing goodness, fostering concord and preserving unity, praying that all these sacrifices may open the way to a future of full communion between us and of peace for all.

The impressive history of holiness of this land is distinguished not only by the sacrifice of the martyrs. No sooner had the ancient persecutions ended, than a new and selfless form of life arose as a gift of the Lord: monasticism originated in the desert. Thus, the great signs that God had once worked in Egypt and at the Red Sea (cf. *Ps 106:21-22*) were followed by the miracle of a new life

that made the desert blossom with sanctity. With veneration for this shared patrimony, I have come as a pilgrim to this land that the Lord himself loves to visit. For here, in his glory he came down upon Mount Sinai (cf. *Ex* 24:16), and here, in his humility, he found refuge as a child (cf. *Mt* 2:14).

Your Holiness, dearest brother, may the same Lord today grant us to set out together as pilgrims of communion and messengers of peace. On this journey, may the Virgin Mary take us by the hand, she who brought Jesus here, and whom the great Egyptian theological tradition has from of old acclaimed as *Theotokos*, the Mother of God. In this title, humanity and divinity are joined, for in his Mother, God became forever man. May the Blessed Virgin, who constantly leads us to Jesus, the perfect symphony of divine and human, bring yet once more a bit of heaven to our earth.

Common Declaration

COMMON DECLARATION OF HIS HOLINESS FRANCIS AND HIS HOLINESS TAWADROS II

1. We, Francis, Bishop of Rome and Pope of the Catholic Church, and Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, give thanks to God in the Holy Spirit for granting us the joyful opportunity to meet once more, to exchange a fraternal embrace and to join again in common prayer. We glorify the Almighty for the bonds of fraternity and friendship existing between the See of Saint Peter and the See of Saint Mark. The privilege of being together here in Egypt is a sign that the solidity of our relationship is increasing year by year, and that we are growing in closeness, faith and love of Christ our Lord. We give thanks to God for this beloved Egypt, the “homeland that lives inside us,” as His Holiness Pope Shenouda III used to say, the “people blessed by God” (cf. *Is* 19:25) with its ancient Pharaonic civilization, the Greek and Roman heritage, the Coptic tradition and the Islamic presence. Egypt is the place where the Holy Family found refuge, a land of martyrs and saints.

2. Our deep bond of friendship and fraternity has its origin in the full communion that existed between our Churches in the first centuries and was expressed in many different ways through the early Ecumenical Councils, dating back to the Council of Nicaea in 325 and the contribution of the courageous Church Father Saint Athanasius, who earned the title “Protector of the Faith”. Our communion was expressed through prayer and similar liturgical practices, the veneration of the same martyrs and saints, and in the development and spread of monasticism, following the

example of the great Saint Anthony, known as the Father of all monks.

This common experience of communion before the time of separation has a special significance in our efforts to restore full communion today. Most of the relations which existed in the early centuries between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church have continued to the present day in spite of divisions, and have recently been revitalized. They challenge us to intensify our common efforts to persevere in the search for visible unity in diversity, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

3. We recall with gratitude the historic meeting forty-four years ago between our predecessors, Pope Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III, in an embrace of peace and fraternity, after many centuries when our mutual bonds of love were not able to find expression due to the distance that had arisen between us. The Common Declaration they signed on 10 May 1973 represented a milestone on the path of ecumenism, and served as a starting point for the Commission for Theological Dialogue between our two Churches, which has borne much fruit and opened the way to a broader dialogue between the Catholic Church and the whole family of Oriental Orthodox Churches. In that Declaration, our Churches acknowledged that, in line with the apostolic tradition, they profess “one faith in the One Triune God” and “the divinity of the Only-begotten Son of God ... perfect God with respect to his divinity, perfect man with respect to his humanity”. It was also acknowledged that “the divine life is given to us and is nourished in us through the seven sacraments” and that “we venerate the Virgin Mary, Mother of the True Light”, the “*Theotokos*”.

4. With deep gratitude we recall our own fraternal meeting in Rome on 10 May 2013, and the establishment of 10 May as the day when each year we deepen the friendship and brotherhood between our Churches. This renewed spirit of closeness has enabled us to discern once more that the bond uniting us was received from our one Lord on the day of our Baptism. For it is through Baptism that we become members of the one Body of Christ that is the Church (cf. *1 Cor* 12:13). This common heritage is the basis of our pilgrimage together towards full communion, as we grow in love and reconciliation.

5. We are aware that we still have far to go on this pilgrimage, yet we recall how much has already been accomplished. In particular, we call to mind the meeting between Pope Shenouda III and Saint John Paul II, who came as a pilgrim to Egypt during the Great Jubilee of the year 2000. We are determined to follow in their footsteps, moved by the love of Christ the good Shepherd, in the profound conviction that by walking together, we grow in unity. May we draw our strength from God, the perfect source of communion and love.

6. This love finds its deepest expression in common prayer. When Christians pray together, they come to realize that what unites them is much greater than what divides them. Our longing for unity receives its inspiration from the prayer of Christ “that all may be one” (*Jn* 17:21). Let us deepen our shared roots in the one apostolic faith by praying together and by seeking common

translations of the Lord's Prayer and a common date for the celebration of Easter.

7. As we journey towards the blessed day when we will at last gather at the same Eucharistic table, we can cooperate in many areas and demonstrate in a tangible way the great richness which already unites us. We can bear witness together to fundamental values such as the sanctity and dignity of human life, the sacredness of marriage and the family, and respect for all of creation, entrusted to us by God. In the face of many contemporary challenges such as secularization and the globalization of indifference, we are called to offer a shared response based on the values of the Gospel and the treasures of our respective traditions. In this regard, we are encouraged to engage in a deeper study of the Oriental and Latin Fathers, and to promote a fruitful exchange in pastoral life, especially in catechesis, and in mutual spiritual enrichment between monastic and religious communities.

8. Our shared Christian witness is a grace-filled sign of reconciliation and hope for Egyptian society and its institutions, a seed planted to bear fruit in justice and peace. Since we believe that all human beings are created in the image of God, we strive for serenity and concord through a peaceful co-existence of Christians and Muslims, thus bearing witness to God's desire for the unity and harmony of the entire human family and the equal dignity of each human being. We share a concern for the welfare and the future of Egypt. All members of society have the right and duty to participate fully in the life of the nation, enjoying full and equal citizenship and collaborating to build up their country. Religious freedom, including freedom of conscience, rooted in the dignity of the person, is the cornerstone of all other freedoms. It is a sacred and inalienable right.

9. Let us intensify our unceasing prayer for all Christians in Egypt and throughout the whole world, and especially in the Middle East. The tragic experiences and the blood shed by our faithful who were persecuted and killed for the sole reason of being Christian, remind us all the more that the ecumenism of martyrdom unites us and encourages us along the way to peace and reconciliation. For, as Saint Paul writes: "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (*1 Cor 12:26*).

10. The mystery of Jesus who died and rose out of love lies at the heart of our journey towards full unity. Once again, the martyrs are our guides. In the early Church the blood of the martyrs was the seed of new Christians. So too in our own day, may the blood of so many martyrs be the seed of unity among all Christ's disciples, a sign and instrument of communion and peace for the world.

11. In obedience to the work of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies the Church, keeps her throughout the ages, and leads her to full unity – that unity for which Jesus Christ prayed:

Today we, Pope Francis and Pope Tawadros II, in order to please the heart of the Lord Jesus, as well as that of our sons and daughters in the faith, mutually declare that we, with one mind and heart, will seek sincerely not to repeat the baptism that has been administered in either of our Churches for any person who wishes to join the other. This we confess in obedience to the Holy

Scriptures and the faith of the three Ecumenical Councils assembled in Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus.

We ask God our Father to guide us, in the times and by the means that the Holy Spirit will choose, to full unity in the mystical Body of Christ.

12. Let us, then, be guided by the teachings and the example of the Apostle Paul, who writes: “[Make] every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you too were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (*Eph 4:3-6*).

Cairo, 28th April 2017