



Address of the Holy Father Pope Francis

31.03.2013 | Pope Francis

Audience with representatives of the churches and ecclesial communities and of the different religions.

Clementine Hall

Wednesday, 20 March 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Before all else, I express my heartfelt thanks for what my brother Andrew [Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios I] has said to us. Many thanks! Many thanks!

It is a source of particular joy for me to meet today with you, the delegates of the Orthodox Churches, of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and of the Ecclesial Communities of the West. I thank you for taking part in the celebration which marked the beginning of my ministry as the Bishop of Rome and the Successor of Peter.

Yesterday morning, during Holy Mass, through you I felt the spiritual presence of the communities which you represent. In this expression of faith, it seemed that we were experiencing all the more urgently the prayer for unity between believers in Christ and at the same time seeing prefigured in some way its full realization, which depends on God's plan and our own faithful cooperation.

I begin my apostolic ministry during this year which my venerable predecessor Benedict XVI, with truly inspired intuition, proclaimed for the Catholic Church as a Year of Faith. With this initiative, which I wish to continue and which I trust will prove a stimulus for our common journey of faith, he wanted to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council by proposing a sort of pilgrimage towards what all Christians consider essential: the personal, transforming encounter with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died and rose for our salvation. The core message of the Council is found precisely in the desire to proclaim this perennially valid treasure of faith to the men and women of our time.

Along with you, I cannot forget all that the Council meant for the progress of ecumenism. Here I would like to recall the words of Blessed John XXIII, the fiftieth anniversary of whose death we shall soon celebrate, in his memorable opening address: "The Catholic Church considers it her duty to work actively for the fulfilment of the great mystery of that unity for which Jesus Christ prayed so earnestly to his heavenly Father on the eve of his great sacrifice; the knowledge that she is so intimately associated with that prayer is for her an occasion of ineffable peace and joy" (AAS 54 [1962], 793]. These were the words of Pope John.

Yes, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us all feel closely united to the prayer of our Saviour at the Last Supper, to his appeal: *ut unum sint*. Let us ask the Father of mercies to enable us to live fully the faith graciously bestowed upon us on the day of our Baptism and to bear witness to it freely, joyfully and courageously. This will be the best service we can offer to the cause of Christian unity, a service of hope for a world still torn by divisions, conflicts and rivalries. The more we are faithful to his will, in our thoughts, words and actions, the more we will progress, really and substantially, towards unity.

For my part, I wish to assure you that, in continuity with my predecessors, it is my firm intention to pursue the path of ecumenical dialogue, and I thank the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity for the help that it continues to provide, in my name, in the service of this most noble cause. I ask you, dear brothers and sisters, to bring my cordial greetings and the assurance of my prayerful remembrance in the Lord Jesus to the Christian communities which you represent, and I beg of you the charity of a special prayer for me, that I may be a pastor according to the heart of Christ.

And now I turn to you, the distinguished representatives of the Jewish people, to whom we are linked by a most special spiritual bond, since, as the Second Vatican Council stated "the Church of Christ recognizes that in God's plan of salvation the beginnings of her faith and her election are to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4). I thank you for your presence and I trust that, with the help of the Most High, we can make greater progress in that fraternal dialogue which the Council wished to encourage (cf. *ibid.*) and which has indeed taken place, bearing no little fruit, especially in recent decades.

I also greet and cordially thank all of you, dear friends who are followers of other religious traditions; first Muslims, who worship God as one, living and merciful, and invoke him in prayer, and all of you. I greatly appreciate your presence: in it, I see a tangible sign of a will to grow in mutual esteem and in cooperation for the common good of humanity.

The Catholic Church is conscious of the importance of promoting friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions – I want to repeat this: promoting friendship and respect between men and women of different religious traditions – a sign of this can be seen in the important work carried out by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The Church is likewise conscious of the responsibility which all of us have for our world, for the whole of creation, which we must love and protect. There is much that we can do to benefit the poor, the needy and those who suffer, and to favour justice, promote reconciliation and build peace. But before all else we need to keep alive in our world the thirst for the absolute, and to counter the dominance of a one-dimensional vision of the human person, a vision which reduces human beings to what they produce and to what they consume: this is one of the most insidious temptations of our time.

We know how much violence has resulted in recent times from the attempt to eliminate God and the divine from the horizon of humanity, and we are aware of the importance of witnessing in our societies to that primordial openness to transcendence which lies deep within the human heart. In this, we also sense our closeness to all those men and women who, although not identifying themselves as followers of any religious tradition, are nonetheless searching for truth, goodness and beauty, the truth, goodness and beauty of God. They are our valued allies in the commitment to defending human dignity, in building a peaceful coexistence between peoples and in safeguarding and caring for creation.

Dear friends, once again I thank you for your presence. I offer all of you my heartfelt, fraternal good wishes.