Letter of ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew to pope Francis

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29 June 2013

Feast of St Peter and St Paul

With confident anticipation, we now contemplate our mutual journey to the common cup

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Feast of St Peter and St Paul

His Holiness and Beatitude Pope Francis of Senior Rome: rejoice in the Lord.
“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” (1 Peter 1:3-4) is also our confession from the most holy Church of Constantinople-New Rome with Peter the chief of the Apostles, even as we address a wholehearted fraternal greeting and festive embrace to Your esteemed and beloved Holiness on this auspicious day of celebration in honour of the holy
Apostles Peter and Paul, which marks the Patronal Feast of Your venerable Church of Rome.

In continuation of this tradition, the Ecumenical Patriarchate participates once again this year in the joy that on this day you adorn for the first time the Throne of the ancient Church of Rome of Your Holiness. Therefore, it delights with You and Your devout faithful on the occasion of the feast of
these two holy Apostles, expressing the expectation and hope that the overtures of Your Holiness toward simplicity and charity, universally received with a sense of gratitude and gratification, will profoundly nurture the Church and orient its attitude toward the essential dimensions of lawfulness, justice and mercy, in accordance with the doctrines and demands of its founder, our Lord Jesus Christ, who has truly called us all “to a living hope.”

The well and widely known position of Your Holiness on these issues of simplicity and charity proved very moving. Moreover, it is also true that the Church of Christ and its members have always been inspired by the very same ideas and principles of charity and simplicity. Contemporary Christian communities are replete with philanthropic and beneficent institutions and individuals; nonetheless, the needs are also plentiful, particularly in our age – and age of financial crisis and challenge, but also a crisis of values and institutions – which is precisely why we must constantly motivate people’s charitable sensitivities in order to respond to and resolve problems of poverty.

This spirit of simplicity must surely also characterize relations among Churches and Christians, who for reasons known to the Lord are divided today into different Christian churches and confessions. It is our personal hope that the ongoing dialogues among the various Churches – and especially the dialogue between our two great Churches of Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity, a dialogue of love, theology and truth – will continue to bear fruit in a spirit of simplicity and fraternity, of mutual understanding and truthfulness, in order to bring about the desired result of rapprochement through the unique authenticity in Christ, which alone is ultimately able to unite – and will unite – all Christians.

Your Holiness, our faith is not a compilation of diverse opinions promulgated to integrate discussion in a harmonious way; it is the revelation of the singular truth expressed through and in the divine person of Jesus Christ, in order that the final goal for all those in dialogue should be to approach, touch, comprehend and experience His divine person, who recapitulates the truth manifested to those that are with Him in the Holy Spirit.

The Patronal Feast of a Church – today of Your Church in Rome and next November of our Church in Constantinople, when we commemorate the holy Apostle Andrew, first-called among the apostles – constitutes a highlight and milestone in its spiritual journey. It provides an opportunity to reflect on the past and envisage the future. Events and occurrences in the past must be duly assessed and accordingly categorized into those that are proper and to be promoted, or else into those that are improper and to be shunned.

Would that every new period of such celebration be filled with those initiatives and activities on the part of Your venerable Holiness and Your historical Church, which should be emulated, praised and advanced. In this way, we shall be enabled

to approach the truth in Christ properly as brothers, sharing and sojourning with Him “into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” so that “our faith may be tested by fire and found to result in praise, honour and glory” (1Peter 1.7). “For it is God’s will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish . . . instead honouring everyone, loving the family of believers, and fearing God.” (1 Peter 2.15 and 17).

[…] Behold, with confident anticipation, we now contemplate our mutual journey to the common cup. We are not ignorant of the existing impediments to the desirable unity of all Christians. Nevertheless, we shall not cease working with all our strength and aspiring to the All-Holy Spirit. According to Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople, “this Spirit is most prudent and extremely loving; if it should discover fishermen, it can lure to Christ the entire world, captivating them by the fishing net of the word,” just as Peter did. Indeed, “it can transform the passion of fanatical persecutors and create a Paul in the place of Saul, captivating them with the same intensity of piety and they had been captivated by evil. Such is the Spirit of meekness.” Today, the same Spirit also renders us “bold heralds” of Christian unity, for whose sake we ceaselessly “bend our knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” For this Spirit “always was, is, and shall be; it is without beginning and without end.” Thus it shall always inspire in us the desire for unity in simplicity and the salvation of all. “Let us, however, stand together and glorify the Trinity together,” Father, Son and Holy Spirit, “through whom alone can we acquire one assembly, one worship, adoration, power, perfection, and sanctification.” This is how the same Spirit “delights in bestowing upon us its divine gifts.”

Wherefore, in celebrating together with Your beloved Holiness, we recite the hymns of our Orthodox Church in honour of our mutual and glorious patron saints: “Rejoice, blessed and matching counterparts, sharing a single soul in two bodies. Rejoice in the Lord forever, Peter and Paul. We invoke your unceasing prayers for us and implore the fulfilment of your promises to us.” Rejoice and be mindful of us. As you stand directly before the Holy Trinity, entreat for the salvation of us all, so that we may obtain the eternal gifts in Christ Jesus our Lord. To Him be all glory and might, honour and worship, gratitude and thanksgiving, together with His Father, who is without beginning, and His All-Holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and always, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Your Holiness’ Beloved brother in Christ,

+ Bartholomew,
Ecumenical Patriarch