

Your Holiness,

On this festive day, we are delighted to convey our fraternal congratulatory wishes to Your Holiness through our Patriarchal Delegation, consisting of His Eminence Metropolitan Job of Pisidia, Co-President of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between our two Sister Churches, His Grace Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzos, and the Very Reverend Patriarchal Deacon Kallinikos, Secretary of this year's venerable representation, in continuation of the established tradition of exchanging delegations on the occasion of our respective Thronal Feasts.

For today rejoices *"the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome, by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul,"* as writes Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, a son of the Church of Smyrna in Asia Minor, a disciple of Saint Polycarpus, who once stated that *"it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its pre-eminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolic tradition has been preserved continuously"* (*Adversus Haereses* III, 3, 2).

Indeed, it is our conviction that theological disputes of the past must be clarified and overcome through a sincere theological dialogue based on the Apostolic Tradition and our shared heritage of the first millennium in order to restore today the full ecclesiastical communion between our two sister Churches. This dialogue of truth was initiated almost half a century ago by our mutual predecessors of blessed memory, Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios.

We are particularly pleased that the fifteenth plenary meeting of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between our Churches met at the beginning of this month in the ancient city of Alexandria, the see of the second Throne of Orthodoxy, and reached an agreement on the document entitled 'Synodality and Primacy in the Second Millennium and Today.' This document gives, as far as possible, a shared reading of the controversies of the second millennium regarding the practice of primacy in the context of synodality, in the

West as well as in the East, in a spirit of openness so as to *"further the mutual understanding and trust that are essential prerequisites for reconciliation at the start of the third millennium,"* as stated in its introduction.

This document paves the way for an even more promising dialogue, not merely a dialogue of love but, foremost, a dialogue of truth. As decided by the Commission, the next topic of the interchange will examine the theological and canonical issues that remain to be resolved so that communion may be re-established between our two Churches. This dialogue of truth implies serious and responsible research and the commitment of hierarchs, clergy and theologians officially appointed by their local Churches, as well as the prayerful support of all the people of God, both clergy and laity, since no decision could ever be taken concerning the restoration of communion between our sister Churches except through a synodal way.

As the document of Alexandria concludes, *"Having reflected together on the history of the second millennium, we acknowledge that a common reading of the sources can inspire the practice of synodality and primacy in the future. Observing the mandate of our Lord to love one another as he has loved us (Jn. 13:34), it is our Christian duty to strive for unity in faith and life."*

In this spirit, we would also like to express our sincere thanks to Your Holiness for granting a church for our Holy Metropolis of Smyrna, the see of Saint Polycarpus and the homeland of Saint Irenaeus. As the famous Synodal Encyclical of our Ecumenical Throne to all the Christian Churches everywhere expressed in 1920, by allowing each other the use of chapels and churches, we cultivate friendship and kindly disposition towards each other, and thus, *"many good things will be achieved for the glory and the benefit [...] of the Christian body."*

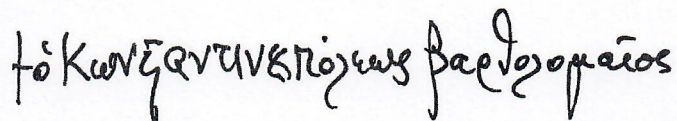
The same encyclical pointed out over a century ago the dangers that can *"attack the very foundations of the Christian faith and the essence of Christian life and society,"* such as war which brings to light *"many unhealthy symptoms in the life of the Christian peoples,"* and often reveals a *"great lack of respect even for the elementary principles of justice and charity."*

In this spirit, we need to demonstrate solidarity with the long-suffering people of Ukraine and pray for the peace of the whole world.

Your Holiness, dearest Brother Francis, celebrating together with You in spirit the Thronal Feast of the Church of Rome today, we reiterate our deepest desire for the restoration of communion between our Churches and pray that our Merciful Lord, the Prince of Peace, grant You a speedy recovery and good health, for You are a precious Man of God, a tireless artisan at work for Christian unity and world peace. Conveying to Your Holiness, the venerable hierarchs, clergy, and all the Christ-loving faithful of Your Church, our warmest greetings, we embrace you fraternally and remain with much honour and love in our Lord, Jesus Christ, who prayed that "all may be one" (Jn. 17:21).

At the Ecumenical Patriarchate,
on the twenty-ninth of June, 2023

Your Holiness'
beloved Brother in Christ,



✠ BARTHOLOMEW
*Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome
and Ecumenical Patriarch*

His Holiness Pope Francis
Bishop of Rome
In Vatican City.