

OFFICIAL RECEPTION BY POPE JOHN PAUL II

3 December 1987

On arrival in Vatican City, the motorcade went immediately to the Torre San Giovanni (St. Johns Tower) where in 1967 the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I had also been given hospitality on the occasion of his visit to Pope Paul VI. Pope John Paul II was at the Torre San Giovanni to warmly welcome Patriarch Dimitrios on his arrival. Among others present to welcome the Patriarch were Sebastiano Cardinal Baggio, President of the Pontifical Commission for the Vat-

ican City State, and Marchese Giulio Sacchetti, Special Delegate of the same Commission.

Later in the afternoon the Ecumenical Patriarch visited St Peters Basilica including the excavation under the Basilica and tombs of Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI. He was welcomed by the Archpriest of the Basilica, Aurelio Cardinal Sabattani, Archbishop Zanini and the Basilica Chapter. Although no official statements were made on this occasion, this pilgrimage to the

Basilica marked the beginning of the official visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch to the Church of Rome.

Then at six o' clock in the evening, Pope John Paul II received Dimitrios I and his entourage at his private library in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican. Also present were those Catholic dignitaries who welcomed the Patriarch at the airport.

POPE'S DISCOURSE ON RECEIVING THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH

Your Holiness,

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Ps 118:26).

This blessing of the psalmist seems quite appropriate to me for expressing my sentiments on this first day of your visit to the Church of Rome and to its Bishop.

You come to us in the name of the Lord.

We receive you in the name of the Lord.

In him, we are brothers by the grace of baptism and of the priesthood. Dear brother in the Lord, welcome! It is with a heart full of joy that I receive you who come as a pilgrim to the tombs of the holy Apostles and martyrs Peter and Paul; you who, in visiting us, are carrying out the ministry of charity, unity and peace.

Eight years ago I had the great pleasure of being able to exchange the kiss of peace with you in your patriarchal residence of the Phanar. The reception which you and your Church offered me at that time was so marked by esteem and filled with affection that I still have a vivid and grateful memory of it. This memory increases my joy in seeing you among us today and in being able to show you equal esteem and affection.

Moved by the same fraternal charity, we will pray together in these days for the welfare of our Churches in order that our common Lord may grant them the grace of a perfect communion in faith and love. Furthermore, we will not fail to intercede together for this world to which we have been sent and which God has loved to such an extent as to send his only Son to save it (cf. *John* 3:16-17).

We will seek together to respond to the demands of the present hour according to the Lord's will as we open ourselves to the illumination of his Spirit.

In the certitude that we can count on God's assistance that your visit will bear fruit for his

glory, I repeat to Your Holiness, to Their Eminences the Metropolitans who have accompanied you, as well as to the reverend deacons and distinguished members of the laity who have come with you: welcome in the name of the Lord!

THE PATRIARCH'S RESPONSE

In response to the Holy Father's welcome, the Patriarch gave the following address.

Your Holiness, Pope of Ancient Rome, Beloved Brother in Christ!

At this, our first meeting in your venerable See, in the city of Rome, sanctified by the blood of the leading Apostles, let us give thanks to the Lord of the Church and of the whole world for his gift of this meeting in his name and in his love.

Where there is a meeting, the stranger ceases to be a stranger and becomes familiar. This is all the more true when those who meet are, as in this case, already neighbours, friends, brothers in Christ, in him who can create a stronger and more indissoluble unity, a unity based on the common confession, on the part of those meeting, that he is the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world.

In meeting we enrich one another. We have come to you, bringing with love the ethos of freedom in Christ, together with the rich tradition of our Orthodox East. At the same time, we have come to receive what the Latin West has to offer to the common cause of the reconciliation of our Churches. We have come for an exchange of spiritual treasures, in a spirit of love and esteem. We shall certainly leave here enriched. We are also certain that the presence of the chief Patriarch of the East in the heart of the Christian West is destined to mean much for it, with the Lord's grace, for the good of his one Church.

We pray the Lord, then, to bless our comings and goings in this place and to lead us ever closer to one another, until we all attain to the unity of the faith (cf. *Eph* 4:13).

We warmly thank Your Holiness for your cordial welcome which honours us, for your kind words, and for the love and joy you display at our presence in your home.

Beloved and holy brother, may the years of your life and of your exalted and sacred service be many, and may they be blessed by God!