

THE "ANGELUS"

December 6, 1987

Following the Eucharistic Liturgy, Pope John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I went to the Loggia of Blessing, the central balcony of the facade of St Peters Basilica, to greet the faithful who had gathered for the Angelus. Before the recitation of the Angelus, both the Pope and the Patriarch addressed those assembled in the square.

During the current Marian year, the Pope has been using the occasion of the Sunday Angelus to give a brief discourse on Marian shrines throughout the world. On this special occasion he spoke of an important sanctuary of the Orthodox world dedicated to Mary.

THE POPE'S ADDRESS

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I have the joy of having at my side for the recitation of the Angelus the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I. Let us greet him most cordially and thank him for his visit to Rome.

1. The goal of our spiritual pilgrimage today is a place that is dear to the hearts of the Orthodox, Mount Athos. It is also known as "the Virgin's garden" because, according to the Athosite tradition, the vessel on which the Virgin Mary was sailing to Ephesus was blown off course by a tempest and she therefore landed at Mount Athos. At the centre of the "Virgin's Garden" is preserved the icon "Axion Estin", the most venerated image of the Greek Orthodox world. This image, called "the Merciful Virgin" ("Eleousa"), shows Mary Most Holy holding in her right arm her Son, who is holding in his hand the Scriptures which are opened at chapter 61, verse 1 of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me", the text which Jesus explained in the synagogue at Nazareth, at the beginning of his public life (cf. *Lk* 4:16 ff.). The icon is called "Axion Estin" in memory of a miraculous event which took place in the hermitage now dedicated to St Andrew near Karies, the administrative centre of the Holy Mountain.

According to a pious tradition, on the night of June 10-11, 982, the Archangel Gabriel appeared, dressed as a monk, and recited for the first time, during the nocturnal liturgical cele-

bration ("Agrypnia") the hymn which begins with the words "Axion Estin":

"It is truly just to proclaim you blessed,
O Deipara, who are most blessed, all pure,
and Mother of Our God.
We glorify you,
who are more honourable than the cherubim,
and incomparably more glorious than the
seraphim,
You who are truly the Mother of God".

2. From that time, every June 11 on Mount Athos is held the solemn celebration of the icon, and before it they sing that which has become the most popular hymn of Orthodox devotion.

The image has been transferred from the hermitage of St Andrew to the Church of the Protaton at Karies and placed on a throne at the centre of the sanctuary. Before this image day and night a candle burns in a very precious golden candelabra decorated with diamonds. The monks alternate uninterruptedly in prayer and vigil before the icon.

May the Virgin "Axion Estin" fill with all her blessings those who, in her "Garden" have dedicated their lives to her Son with the radical generosity which is characteristic of the monastic life. May she guide, in obedience and in the pilgrimage of faith, all those men and women who never cease to pray for the Church, that she may be preserved in the integrity of her patrimony transmitted once for all to the entire Christian people.

THE PATRIARCH'S ADDRESS

After the Holy Father spoke, the Ecumenical Patriarch addressed a greeting to the faithful.

Roman citizens and foreigners who reside here!

"Grace, mercy and peace be with you from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son in truth and love (2 *John* 33).

We address to you the very same greeting of the beloved disciple, standing with deep love of Christ at the side of our brother Pope John Paul II, under the protection of all the saints and in particular of the All Holy Mother of God and Ever Virgin Mary.

Let us all together ask her intercession in this moment, that the day of our full and complete union in the one faith and common celebration of the sacraments of the Church will come very soon. Perhaps for many people this is something very distant, if not impossible. However, for us believers, "what is impossible for human beings is possible for God" (*Lk 18:27*).

We bring you the blessing of the lands of the ecumenical Councils of the undivided Church, as we celebrate together this year the important anniversary of the last of these Councils. We bring you the blessing of the Fathers, the martyrs and confessors, the ascetics of our Ortho-

dox Orient. We bring you the kiss and love of your Orthodox brothers and sisters.

Here in these days, together with our brother the Pope, we have spent moments of spiritual elevation and exaltation. We have prayed for one another, for our Churches, and for the whole world. For you who are watching and listening to us at this moment we pray fervently and we bless you.

May the love of God remain in your hearts'

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit!

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