

POPE BENEDICT XVI'S APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO TURKEY

November 28 - December 1, 2006

VISIT TO THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH, BARTHOLOMEW I

PRAYER SERVICE, ST GEORGE CHURCH

November 29

On Wednesday evening, November, 29, the Holy Father flew from Izmir to Istanbul. His Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch, was among those meeting him.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople is the centre of Orthodoxy worldwide. It has been located at the Phanar since 1601.

The Holy Father went directly from the airport to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Benedict XVI and His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew I led the procession into the Patriarchal Church of St George for an Evening Prayer Service in the Byzantine rite. The Patriarch addressed a brotherly welcome to the Pope, who then delivered his Discourse.

After the prayers, they both venerated the relics of St Gregory the Theologian and St John Chrysostom, some of which John Paul II presented to Bartholomew I in 2004. The Holy Father and the Patriarch then had a private meeting in the Patriarchal Palace.

THE POPE'S DISCOURSE

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity" (Ps 133:1).

Your Holiness,

I am deeply grateful for the fraternal welcome extended to me by you personally and by the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. I will treasure its memory for ever. I thank the Lord for the grace of this encounter, so filled with authentic goodwill and ecclesial significance. It gives me great joy to be among you, my brothers in Christ, in this Cathedral Church, as we pray together to the Lord and call to mind the momentous events that have sustained our commitment to work for the full unity of Catholics and Orthodox.

I wish above all to recall the courageous decision to remove the memory of the anathemas of 1054. The joint declaration of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, written in a spirit of rediscovered love, was solemnly read in a celebration held simultaneously in St Peter's Basilica in Rome and in this Patriarchal Cathedral. The Tomos of the Patriarch was based on the Johannine profession of faith: "Ho Theos agape estin" (7 Jn 4:9), Deus caritas est! In perfect agreement, Pope Paul VI chose to begin his own Brief with the Pauline exhortation: "Ambulate in dilectione" (Eph 5:2), "Walk in love".

It is on this foundation of mutual love that new relations between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople have developed.

Signs of this love have been evident in numerous declarations of shared commitment and many meaningful gestures.

Both Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II were warmly received as visitors in this Church of St George, and joined respectively with Patriarchs Athenagoras I and Dimitrios I in strengthening the impetus towards mutual understanding and the quest of full unity. May their names be honoured and blessed!

I also rejoice to be in this Land so closely connected to the Christian faith, where many Churches flourished in ancient times.

I think of St Peter's exhortations to the early Christian communities "in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1 Pt 1:1), and the rich harvest of martyrs, theologians, pastors, monastics, and holy men and women which those Churches brought forth over the centuries.

I likewise recall the outstanding saints and pastors who have watched over the See of Constantinople, among them St Gregory of Nazianzus and St John Chrysostom, whom the West also honours as Doctors of the Church. Their relics rest in the Basilica of St Peter in the Vatican, and a part of them were given to Your Holiness as a sign of communion by the late Pope John Paul II for veneration in this very Cathedral. Truly, they are worthy intercessors for us before the Lord.

In this part of the Eastern world were also held the seven Ecumenical Councils which Orthodox and Catholics alike acknowledge as authoritative for the faith and discipline of the Church. They are enduring milestones and guides along our path towards full unity.

I conclude by expressing once more my joy to be with you. May this meeting strengthen our mutual affection and renew our common commitment to persevere on the journey leading to reconciliation and the peace of the Churches.

I greet you in the love of Christ. May the Lord be always with you.

ORE, December 6, 2006

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