



The Holy See

ECUMENICAL CELEBRATION ON THE OCCASION OF THE TRANSFERRAL FROM ROME TO CONSTANTINOPLE OF THE RELICS OF STS GREGORY OF NAZIANZEN AND JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE HIS HOLINESS BARTHOLOMEW I

*To my beloved Brother
Bartholomew I
Patriarch of Constantinople*

1. The joy of our meeting on 29 June of this year, the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, held in the Square of this Vatican Basilica, is still alive in my heart. And now, at the tomb of the Apostle Peter, the Lord in his goodness gives us the opportunity to meet once again, in fraternal charity, in prayer and in the desire to journey together towards the full and visible union that Christ wills for his disciples.

This occasion has been offered to us for the common veneration of the relics of Sts Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, two Fathers of the Eastern Church, two Holy Patriarchs of Constantinople, two Doctors of the Church who, with St Basil the Great, have always been honoured with a feast day in the Catholic Church. For us, each time that we "meet our Fathers... we are strengthened in faith and encouraged in hope" (Apostolic Letter *Patres Ecclesiae*, n. 1).

2. And now, some of their relics - remains of those bodies that have followed in the footsteps of Christ, have suffered persecution for his Name and have lived as temples of the Holy Spirit - return to Constantinople.

In the transferral of such holy relics we find a blessed occasion to purify our wounded memories in order to strengthen our journey of reconciliation, to confirm that the faith of these Holy Doctors is

the faith of the Churches of East and West. We also witness to a favourable moment to "show in word and deed today the immense riches that our Churches preserve in the coffers of their traditions" (*Oriente Lumen*, n. 4).

This is the "acceptable time" to join our prayer to their intercession, so that the Lord will hasten the arrival of the moment when we can live full communion together in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, and thus to contribute more effectively so that the world believes that Jesus Christ is Lord.

3. Beloved Brother, I will never tire of searching out, steadfastly and with determination, this communion between Christ's disciples; my desire, in responding to God's will, is to be a servant of communion "in truth and love so that the ship - that beautiful symbol which the World Council of Churches has chosen as its emblem - will not be buffeted by the storms and will one day reach its haven" (*Ut Unum Sint*, n. 97).

May the Lord, who dwells in the midst of his saints (cf. Zec 14: 5), confirm our intentions and watch over us in the daily effort to bring to fulfilment the new commandment.

In the patience of Christ and the charity of God, with fraternal love.

From the Vatican, 27 November 2004

JOHN PAUL II

ADDRESS

OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

HIS HOLINESS BARTHOLOMEW I

Your Holiness,

In recalling the life, faith, ethos and struggles of John Chrysostom, our Father among the saints, we have the impression, also at this sacred and historic moment, that we are hearing him repeat the last words of his earthly life: "*Glory to God for it all!*". And we believe that St Gregory the Theologian would have supported this doxology of thanksgiving because the sacred relics of both these saints are returning to the place where they belong. So ends their involuntary age-old

separation, imposed at the time by unfortunate circumstances for the Church.

This blessed transferral is taking place thanks to the decision of your beloved Holiness, prompted by good will that is pleasing both to you and to us, to restore to us the sacred relics.

In this regard, Your Holiness, you are following the example of St Basil the Great; he returned the venerable relics of St Dionysius, Bishop of Milan, who fell asleep in the Lord while in exile because of the Arians. He was buried in the region entrusted to St Basil himself, as the Saint mentioned in his Letter (n. 197) addressed to St Ambrose, the successor of St Dionysius.

The Church throughout the world, adorned by the venerable blood of the Martyrs - like purple vestments and fine linen - properly respects the relics of her children who in the Lord bore painful sufferings, crucifixion and death, inflicted by wild beasts, fire, the sword and countless adversities.

Consequently, the transferral and return of the relics of our blessed Predecessors to the Most Holy Archdiocese of Constantinople, which they have glorified with their holiness, wisdom, struggles and apostolic work in general, is a cause of joy and exultation, not only for our sacred Ecumenical Throne and for the *pléroma* (fullness) of the whole of our Most Holy Orthodox Church which deeply reveres them, but also for all our Catholic brethren who reside in our See.

Today, a sacred act is being celebrated that atones for an anomaly and an ecclesiastical injustice. This fraternal gesture of the Church of Ancient Rome confirms that no insurmountable problems exist in Christ's Church when love, justice and peace converge in the sacred service of reconciliation and unity.

There is no doubt that the two Saints, whose relics are returning home, are praying for the re-establishment of concord and unity. In their lives, as is well-known, they strove with all their might for the unity of the Church in faith and truth.

The phrase of St John Chrysostom is ever-timely and powerful, where he affirmed that injuring the Church causes greater damage than lapsing into heresy; and that the sin of schism in the Church can never be washed away, not even by the blood of martyrdom.

Moreover, the unparalleled words of peace spoken by St Gregory the Theologian and his incomparable farewell homily are well-known. In it he justified his resignation from the office of Patriarch of Constantinople as a decision that aimed at re-establishing the peace and unity of the Church.

We are convinced, Your Holiness, that you too deeply desire the improvement of interecclesial relations. You therefore submit to many tiring pilgrimages throughout the Ecumene. Every act that heals old wounds and prevents new ones contributes to the creation of the necessary conditions

for continuing the dialogue of truth in love between our Churches, so that, in obedience to the divine will of our Holy God in the adored Trinity, we may meet again as soon as possible in the common faith of the Church as she once was, one foundation on which to re-establish full communion between our Churches.

Finally, we note that with this act you are giving a shining example to imitate, a fraternal message and a recommendation to all those who arbitrarily possess and withhold treasures of faith, piety and civilization that belong to others, so that they may be returned to those who rightfully seek and ask for them.

We thank you with all our heart for all these things, Most Holy and Beloved Brother in Christ. And we thank you for your decision - noble, holy and rich in symbolism - to return these sacred relics to us. We wish you good health and a long life, through the intercession of Sts Gregory and John. So may it be.