

PENTECOST WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE COMMISSION IN ALEXANDRIA

On the Sunday of Pentecost June 4, 2023, a Patriarchal Divine Liturgy was held at the Holy Patriarchal Monastery of St Savvas the Sanctified in Alexandria together with the Great Kneeling Vespers, served by His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa.

Concelebrating with the Primate of the Second Throne Church, were the participants of the deliberations of the International Joint Commission on Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, in the Great City, Their Eminences Metropolitans Job of Pisidia and Maximus of Silivria (Ecumenical Patriarchate), Gennadios of Botswana and Petros of Accra (Patriarchate of Alexandria), Nektarios of Anthedona (Patriarchate of Jerusalem), Joseph of Western and Southern Europe (Patriarchate of Romania), Basileios of Konstantia and Ammochostos Church of Cyprus), Chrysostomos of Messinia (Church of Greece), Ioannis of Korçë (Church of Albania) and George of Mikhailovsky-Košice (Church of Czechia and Slovakia).

Present also in prayer were His Eminence Theodoros Metropolitan of Akhaltsikhe (Patriarchate of Georgia) and Their Eminences the Metropolitans of the Alexandrian Patriarchate Elder Gabriel of Leontopolis Patriarchal Vicar General, George of Guinea, His Beatitude's Representative in Athens, Nicodemus of Memphis, Patriarchal Vicar of Cairo, Panteleimon of Naucratis, Chief Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod, Narcissus of Pelusium, Patriarchal Vicar of Alexandria and Germanos of Tamiathus, Abbot of the Holy Patriarchal Monastery of St Savvas the Sanctified in Alexandria.

During his speech His Beatitude Pope and Patriarch Theodoros II said:

Your Eminences, Very Reverends and Erudite representatives of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches under the heavens, participants in the deliberations of the Joint Theological Committee of the Dialogue of Love in Alexandria,

Honourable Archons, Ladies and Gentlemen, Beloved people of God,

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control" the Apostle Paul teaches us, in writing to the Galatians (Gal. 5:22). With this sweetest ninefold fruit of the Holy Spirit, today we share the joy of Pentecost.

Surely "the Grace of the Holy Spirit brought us together" here in happy times! The Grace of the Holy Spirit has brought us to the Great See of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark, has called us today as bearers and guardians of the immovable Apostolic Legacy of the early Christian years to meet and unite our prayers "for world peace and the state of the universe, stability of the Holy Churches of God and of the unity of all".

Brother representatives of our Most Holy Churches, Orthodox and Roman Catholic,

You have come to the Great City of the Alexandrians in renowned Egypt, bearing the love of your local Churches to the Continent, whose Illuminator and Patron, is the second of the Evangelists, from Egypt and Libya to the southern ends of the African land.

You came to the land of the Nile, cradle of Christianity and creator of Theology that led the Church community under heaven to the path of Truth.

We welcome you as the successor Pope and Patriarch of the great Fathers and Teachers of the Faith, of the Holy Archbishops and Popes who graced the Apostolic and Patriarchal Throne of Alexandria, of the President of the First Ecumenical Synod, Alexander, of the great theologians and pillars of our faith Athanasios and Cyril the Great, of the Hieromartyr Proterius, of the pioneer of love, John the Merciful, and many other holy Archbishops and Popes, who decisively theologized, sacrificially ministered and were martyred, from the acrimonious centuries of heresies and the Arab conquest until recent times.

We welcome you to the holy land of the Nile, whose famous Catechetical School of Alexandria, of Pantaenus, Clement and Origen promoted the link between Christian faith and Greek philosophy, while the vast deserts gave birth to hermit life, asceticism and definitively shaped Monasticism and its Canons, through the spiritual struggles of Pachomius the Great, Anthony the Great, Saint Makarios, Saint Mary of Egypt, as well as an innumerable army of holy Monastics, men and women.

We welcome you as “Father of Fathers, Shepherd of Shepherds and High Priest of High Priests” – in accordance with the patriarchal acclamation of the Primate of the Ancient Church of Alexandria – the much-suffering Africa, formed over the centuries.

The flock of Africa, the “continent of the future” – as it was prophetically characterized by our venerable spiritual Father and Predecessor Parthenios III, past President of the World Council of Churches, one of the pioneers of the “Dialogue of Love” between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches – turns its gaze towards the Holy Center of Alexandria, waiting for us to lead it to the paths of salvation. The indigenous people hunger for Christ and thirst for Justice, but they are also at the disposal of innumerable neo-protestants false prophets and “charismatic” false prophets, “grievous wolves, not sparing the flock”.

We welcome you to an Egypt on which God walked, the place that offered safety from blood-stained Herod to the Infant Lord and Leader of Peace, bringing peace and philanthropy and love. (Esth. 3,13). We are certain that this peace will, continue in mutual respect and loving cooperation to govern the relations of our Apostolic Thrones, but also the ecclesiastical relations in general.

My dear brothers,

Today we are experiencing an extreme transition period. Violence and war, poverty and impoverishment, climate change, the refugee issue, the protection of human rights and social inequality, the protection of childhood and women, the intensifying religious fundamentalism, the crisis of principles and values, lead man to despair. Therefore, the common struggle of all of us, primarily those of us who are spiritual leaders, for the promotion of unity, solidarity, and brotherhood, in recognition that the life of the Church itself is the great revolution in the field of human relations, the protection of the sanctity and beauty of the person and the manifestation of the person’s eternal destiny in Christ.

At this precise moment, the Church of Christ offers the world the testimony of the existence of the living God and the hope of the coming of His Kingdom in history. Under the present circumstances, the work of the International Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, which is meeting for the first time in the See of our Ancient and Apostolic Throne, is undoubtedly a landmark in history and a valuable chapter for the life and further course of the two Churches. And this chapter is already at our disposal and awaits our utilization. It is generally at the disposal of Christianity to serve the ideal of

unity, as it is presented ecclesiologicaly and ontologicaly during today's official celebration of the manifestation of the Church in the world of Christ the Arch Shepherd, on the feast of Pentecost.

It is universally accepted that Theological Dialogue needs to be cultivated, to progress and to bear fruit at all levels with sincerity, honesty, and mutual respect. For the Orthodox Church, contacts, conversations, communications, and in a word, dialogue, are actions intertwined with its being.

The course of the Theological Dialogue of our Churches so far has shown that for a Dialogue to develop, conditions of mutual trust and goodwill must be created. Conditions of freedom and love, two very important dimensions. Also, the theological accomplishments so far surely remind us of the duty and responsibility to continue to promote the work of unity and strengthen the hope that the Lord of History "who sent down from heaven the Holy Spirit in tongues of fire" will bless our future efforts.

Finally, we must not forget that we must cover the long distances of centuries through systematic work, to dissolve prejudices and with humility to learn from the mistakes of the past.

We thank the Triune God who entitled us today to meet and participate in his spiritual banquet of faith and the love that flows from it. We embrace in the Lord the attending brother Hierarchs, priests, and theologians and through them we greet fraternally the Most Holy Primate of Rome, Pope Francis, and the Venerable Primate of the Eastern Orthodox Church, praying that the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, and Redeemer, will look down on His vineyard.

"When He descended and confused the tongues, the Most High divided nations; when tongues were distributed by fire, He called everyone to unity; and together we glorify the Holy Spirit". Amen!" He then gave a work of Egyptian art to Cardinal Koch, to present it to Pope Francis of Rome.

In his reply, His Eminence Kurt Cardinal Koch, Co-President of the international Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue, among others, emphasized the uniqueness of the feast of Pentecost as a day of illumination and truth. Likewise, he conveyed the thanks of the Primate of the Roman Catholic Church for the Abrahamic hospitality of the multi-member delegations of the two Churches and the perfect organization of the deliberations of the Committee.

Afterwards, a festal reception was held in the Throne Room of the Patriarchal Monastery, during which the Their Eminence the Metropolitans Job of Pisidia and Maximos of Silivria presented a silver disc with the relief image of the Virgin Pammakaristos to His Beatitude on behalf of His Holiness Bartholomaios the Ecumenical Patriarch as a sign of honor and thanks for hosting the Joint International Theological Commission, while His Beatitude sent a Patriarchal omophorion and stole to His All Holiness through the above-named Hierarchs.

Also, His Eminence the Metropolitan of Pisidia, Co-Chairman of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue, offered a gift on behalf of His All Holiness Bartholomaios to the Chief Secretary of the Holy Synod, Metropolitan Panteleimon of Naucratis, for the generally excellent organization of the international meeting.

Finally, the HellenicCommunity of Alexandria hosted an official lunch in honor of His Beatitude and the members of the International Joint Theological Commission at its club.

Also participating in the events were the Honourable Consul General of Greece in Alexandria Mr. Athanasios Kotsionis, the Chairman of the Hellenic Community of Alexandria Mr. Andreas Vafiadis, Chairmen of historical Greek Organizations, Associations and Societies in the Land of the Nile, Clergy of the Holy Archdiocese of Alexandria etc.

Photographs by Mr. Gregory Halkiakopoulos, Alexandria