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Audience with a delegation of priests and monks of the Eastern Orthodox Churches

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the young priests and monks of the Eastern Orthodox Churches.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers,

I greet you with joy in the Lord. I am pleased to welcome you for the third edition of this good initiative of visits to Rome by young priests and monks of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. You are welcome! This year you have come at the beginning of Lent, the itinerary followed by Christians in preparation for the Pasch of Christ, the heart of our faith. Another journey comes to mind: the one that two disciples made together with the Risen One on Easter Day (cf. *Lk* 24:13-35). That journey to Emmaus can in a way symbolize the ecumenical path of Christians towards full communion. Indeed, I see common points between the two journeys, three elements that I would like to share with you today.

The first is that, if Christians *walk together*, like the two disciples, they will be accompanied by Christ, who will support, motivate and bring to completion their journey. In fact, Jesus reaches those two disciples, distraught and disoriented, along the road; he approaches them incognito, becoming a wayfarer with them. Then the journey becomes a pilgrimage. Certainly, sadness and withdrawal into themselves prevented their eyes from recognizing him (cf. v. 16); similarly, discouragement and self-referentiality prevent Christians of different denominations from seeing what unites them, from recognizing the One who unites them. Therefore, as believers we must believe that the more we walk together, the more we will be mysteriously accompanied by Christ, because *unity is a common pilgrimage*.

The Evangelist says that those two disciples “were talking and discussing together” (vv. 14-15). This is the

second element, *dialogue*: dialogue of charity, dialogue of truth, dialogue of life, to reprise the three types indicated in the ecumenical *Vademecum* of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity. The dialogue of the pilgrims to Emmaus leads to the dialogue with Jesus, who becomes their exegete; on the basis of their conversations, Christ speaks to their hearts, awakens them, inflames them by explaining in all the Scriptures what refers to Him (cf. v. 27). This shows us that dialogue between Christians is based on the Word of God, which the Lord Jesus lets us understand with the light of His Spirit.

Journeying as pilgrims together and dialogue; we come to the third element: the Evangelist explains that when the disciples approached Emmaus, Jesus “appeared to be going further” (v. 28). The Lord did not impose his presence, but the disciples begged him to stay: “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent” (v. 29). They wished to be together with Christ. They did not each go to their own home, but wanted to prolong their companionship with Jesus and each other, they prayed to him, they insisted. Here is the third element: one must *desire unity* with prayer, with all one’s heart and strength, with insistence, without tiring. Because if the desire for unity is extinguished, it is not enough to walk and dialogue: everything becomes dutiful and formal. If, on the other hand, the desire drives one to open the door to Christ together with one’s brother, everything changes. Scripture reminds us that Jesus does not break the Bread with the renouncing and disunited disciples; it is up to them to invite Him, to welcome Him, to desire Him together. This is perhaps what Christians of the various Confessions lack most today: a burning desire for unity, which comes before partisan interests.

Dear brothers, unity is *pilgrimage*, unity is *dialogue*, unity is *desire*. If we live these three dimensions in the ecumenical journey, then, like those disciples, we will succeed in recognizing Christ together in the breaking of bread and we will benefit from the communion with Him at the same Eucharistic banquet (cf. vv. 30-31). And, just as the two of Emmaus ran back to Jerusalem to tell what they had experienced with joy and amazement, so too will we be able to bear credible witness to the Risen Crucified One, “so that the world may believe” (*Jn* 17:21). Dear brothers, you have set out to come here. I thank you for this. In your pilgrimage to Rome, I hope that you will be able to feel the living presence of the Risen Lord, that our communion will grow in fraternal dialogue, that an ardent desire for unity will be renewed in each one of you.

May the Lord bless you, and may the Mother of God keep you. I ask you to bring my greetings to your bishops and your Churches. Some of you come from troubled Syria; I would like to express a particular closeness to that dear people, tested not only by the war but also by the earthquake which, as in Turkey, has claimed so many victims and caused terrible devastation. In the face of the suffering of so many innocent people, children, women, mothers, families, I hope that everything possible will be done for the people, that there will be no reasons or sanctions to hinder the urgent and necessary aid to the population.

Dear brothers, I thank you and I keep you in my prayers; I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me, as you turn to the Lord. If it pleases you, we can now pray the Lord’s Prayer together, each one in his own language.
