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POPE PRAISES ORTHODOX COMMITMENT TO UNITY

Says Dialogue Is at "Crucial Point"

VATICAN CITY, JUNE 28, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI says that dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox is at a "crucial point" and invited heartfelt prayer to the Holy Spirit for progress to continue.

The Pope said this today when he addressed members of a delegation from Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew I.

The visit reciprocates the habitual exchange of delegations for the respective patronal feasts in which the patriarch of Constantinople sends a delegation to Rome on June 29, the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, and the Pope sends a delegation to Istanbul, Turkey, on Nov. 30, the feast of St. Andrew. In November 2006, Benedict XVI led the delegation himself, and in June 2008, Bartholomew I led the Orthodox delegation to Rome, which coincided with the opening of the Pauline Jubilee Year.

Today, the Orthodox delegation was led by Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima (Limouris), who is the co-secretary of the International Mixed Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.

The Holy Father made reference to Tuesday's feast of Sts. Peter and Paul as testifying to "a time when our communities were living in full communion with one another." Orthodox and Catholics celebrate the feast on the same day.

He added that today's visit, along with the "many meetings that have already taken place in the course of this year" show how the "relations between us are characterized by sentiments of mutual trust, esteem and fraternity."

This, the Pontiff said, "gives grounds for hope that Catholic-Orthodox dialogue will also continue to make significant progress."

Firmly convinced

Benedict XVI highlighted the work of the Orthodox-Catholic mixed commission, saying it "is at a crucial point, having begun last October in Paphos to discuss 'The Role of the Bishop of Rome in the Communion of the Church in the First Millennium.'"

"With all our hearts we pray that, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the members of the commission will continue along this path during the forthcoming plenary session in Vienna, and devote to it the time needed for thorough study of this delicate and important issue," he said.

The Pope also praised the confirmation in Bartholomew I's encyclical letter of last February that he and the synod of Constantinople "share our firm conviction of the importance of this dialogue."

Middle East synod

The Bishop of Rome went on to speak of the importance of the theme of unity for the synod on the Middle East, which will be held in Rome in October.

"The difficulties that the Christians of the Middle East are experiencing are in large measure common to all: living as a minority, and yearning for authentic religious freedom and for peace," he said. And he added that he'll be happy to welcome the delegation the Ecumenical Patriarch will send to participate in the synod's work.

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