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UDIENZA AI MEMBRI DELLA COMMISSIONE PER IL DIALOGO TEOLOGICO CON LE CHIESE ORTODOSSE ORIENTALI

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Alle 12.30 di questa mattina, nella Sala dei Papi del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, il Santo Padre ha ricevuto in Udienza i membri della Commissione per il dialogo teologico con le Chiese Ortodosse Orientali ed ha loro rivolto il discorso che riportiamo di seguito:

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Brothers in Christ,

It is with great joy that I welcome you, the members of the *Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches*, on the occasion of your fourth plenary meeting. Through you, I gladly extend fraternal greetings to my Venerable Brothers, the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches: His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, His Holiness Patriarch Zakka I Iwas, His Holiness Catholicos Karekin II, His Holiness Catholicos Aram I, His Holiness Patriarch Paulus, His Holiness Patriarch Antonios I and His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Didymus I.

Your meeting concerning the constitution and the mission of the Church is of great importance for our common journey towards the restoration of full communion. The Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches share an ecclesial patrimony stemming from apostolic times and the first centuries of Christianity. This "heritage of experience" should shape our future "guiding our common path towards the re-establishment of full communion" (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 56).

We have been entrusted by the Lord Jesus with the mandate "Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation" (*Mk 16:15*). Many people today are still waiting for the truth of the Gospel to be brought to them. May their thirst for the Good News strengthen our resolve to work and pray diligently for that unity required for the Church to exercise her mission in the world, according to the prayer of Jesus "that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (*Jn 17:23*).

Many of you come from countries of the Middle East. The difficult situation which individuals and Christian communities face in the region is a cause of deep concern for us all. Indeed, Christian minorities find it difficult to survive in the midst of such a volatile geopolitical panorama and are often tempted to emigrate. In these circumstances, Christians of all traditions and communities in the Middle East are called to be courageous and steadfast in the power of the Spirit of Christ (cf. *Christmas Message to Catholics Living in the Middle East Region*, 21 December 2006). May the intercession and example of the many martyrs and saints, who have given courageous witness to Christ in these lands, sustain and strengthen the Christian communities in their faith!

Thank you for presence today and for your ongoing commitment to the path of dialogue and unity. May the Holy Spirit accompany you in your deliberations. To all of you, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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