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CELEBRAZIONE ECUMENICA PRESIDUTA DA SUA SANTITÀ BENEDETTO XVI E DAL CATHOLICOS DI CILICIA DEGLI ARMENI, SUA SANTITÀ ARAM I

Questa mattina, al termine dell'incontro nella Sala dei Papi, Sua Santità Benedetto XVI e Sua Santità Aram I, Catholicos di Cilicia degli Armeni, presiedono una Celebrazione ecumenica nella Cappella "Redemptoris Mater" del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano.

Pubblichiamo di seguito il saluto che il Papa rivolge al Catholicos di Cilicia degli Armeni e alla sua Delegazione:

• SALUTO DEL SANTO PADRE

Your Holiness,

With heartfelt affection in the Lord I greet you and the distinguished members of your delegation on the occasion of your visit to the Church of Rome. Our meeting today stands in continuity with the visit which you made to my beloved predecessor Pope John Paul II in January 1997, and with the many other contacts and mutual visits which, by God's grace, have led in recent years to closer relations between the Catholic Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

In this year of Saint Paul, you will visit the tomb of the Apostle of the Nations and pray with the monastic community at the basilica erected to his memory. In that prayer, you will be united to the great host of Armenian saints and martyrs, teachers and theologians, whose legacy of learning, holiness and missionary achievements are part of the patrimony of the whole Church. We think of Saint Nerses Shnorkhali and Saint Nerses of Lambron who, as Bishop of Tarsus, was known as "the second Paul of Tarsus". That testimony culminated in the twentieth century, which proved a time of unspeakable suffering for your people. The faith and devotion of the Armenian people have been constantly sustained by the memory of the many martyrs who have borne witness to the Gospel down the centuries. May the grace of that witness continue to shape the culture of your nation and inspire in Christ's followers an ever greater trust in the saving and life-giving power of the Cross.

The See of Cilicia has long been involved in encouraging positive ecumenical contacts between the Churches. Indeed, the dialogue between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church has benefited significantly from the presence of its Armenian delegates. We must be hopeful that this dialogue will continue to

move forward, since it promises to clarify theological issues which have divided us in the past but now appear open to greater consensus. I am confident that the current work of the International Commission – devoted to the theme: "The Nature, Constitution and Mission of the Church" – will enable many of the specific issues of our theological dialogue to find their proper context and resolution.

Surely the growth in understanding, respect and cooperation which has emerged from ecumenical dialogue promises much for the proclamation of the Gospel in our time. Throughout the world Armenians live side by side with the faithful of the Catholic Church. An increased understanding and appreciation of the apostolic tradition which we share will contribute to an ever more effective common witness to the spiritual and moral values without which a truly just and humane social order cannot exist. For this reason, I trust that new and practical means will be found to give expression to the common declarations we have already signed.

Your Holiness, I cannot fail to assure you of my daily prayers and deep concern for the people of Lebanon and the Middle East. How can we not be grieved by the tensions and conflicts which continue to frustrate all efforts to foster reconciliation and peace at every level of civil and political life in the region? Most recently we have all been saddened by the escalation of persecution and violence against Christians in parts of the Middle East and elsewhere. Only when the countries involved can determine their own destiny, and the various ethnic groups and religious communities accept and respect each other fully, will peace be built on the solid foundations of solidarity, justice and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples.

With these sentiments and with affection in the Lord, I thank Your Holiness for your visit, and I express my hope that these days spent in Rome will be a source of many graces for you and for all those entrusted to your pastoral care. Upon you and to all the faithful of the Armenian Apostolic Church I invoke an abundance of joy and peace in the Lord.

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