

# Bartholomew: search for unity between Orthodox and Catholics "a duty"

12/02/2008 14:19

TURKEY

NAT da Polis

On the occasion of the feast of St. Andrew, founder of the Church of Constantinople, the patriarch and Cardinal Kasper reaffirm that the ecumenical journey is a road without alternatives.



Istanbul (AsiaNews) - The homilies for the services and celebrations for the patron of Constantinople, St. Andrew, were centered on the certainty that the common journey toward full unity between the two sister Churches - Catholic and Orthodox - is the only answer, including to the challenges of today's world in full economic, political, and social crisis.

The celebrations were attended by a large delegation from the Church of Rome, led by Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the council for Christian unity, representatives of the other Christian confessions, the diplomatic corps, and various authorities.

Ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew began his homily by recalling the historic meeting in Jerusalem in 1964, between Paul VI and Athenagoras, which put an end to the historic and distasteful schism of 1054 between the two sister Churches, initiating a dialogue of love and truth in full and mutual respect, with the objective of reestablishing full communion. And precisely in order to highlight this journey toward full communion, Bartholomew gave the example of the two brothers "in the flesh," Andrew and Peter, who later became spiritual brothers in Christ, to emphasize the role that the two sister Churches must play. Although the two brothers Peter and Andrew followed different geographical paths to testify to the truth of Christ our Lord - the former sanctified the Church of Rome with his own blood, while the latter founded the Church of Byzantium, which later became Constantinople - they have remained united in the course of history through the two Churches: Rome and Constantinople.

This connection between the two apostles, Bartholomew continued, the beginning of which was biological in nature, later became a spiritual bond in the name of our Lord, and ended up constituting the bond that unites the Churches. And this bond must always be kept in mind, continued the ecumenical patriarch, in order to restore full unity. Because today, by honoring the apostle Andrew, one also honors the apostle Peter - it is not possible to think of Peter and Andrew separately. The thorns must therefore be removed which for a millennium have wounded relations between the two Churches, and guidance toward unity must be taken from the spirit of the common tradition of the seven ecumenical councils of the first millennium. And all of this is not only out of respect for our two apostles, Bartholomew concluded, but also because it is our duty toward the contemporary world, which is going through a tremendous sociopolitical, cultural, and economic crisis. A world that has urgent need of the message of peace, of which the founder of our Church, Jesus Christ, is the messenger, through his cross and resurrection. Only then will the word of our Church be credible, when it can also give a message of peace and love: "Come and see" (John 1:47).

Cardinal Kasper, as the pope's representative, also focused in his homily on the importance of dialogue for full unity between the Churches, saying that the same feast is celebrated today in Rome, a sign of our common apostolic heritage, which requires us to work for full communion. Because this ecumenical commitment is not an option, but a duty toward our Lord, in order to be able to consider ourselves an essential part of the Church of Christ, our Lord.

Kasper then cited the three visits of the ecumenical patriarch to Rome in 2008, which included his participation, together with Pope Benedict, in the inauguration of the Pauline year, and his address to the synod of Catholic bishops, also at the invitation of the pope. This reinforced the bonds between Rome and Constantinople. He concluded by speaking of the importance of the document of Ravenna (2007) in the dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox.

Finally, in a conversation with *AsiaNews*, Cardinal Kasper maintained that the journey with the Orthodox, although it will certainly not be short, has started on the right path, "in part because we have many, many things in common with the Orthodox." Moreover, Kasper continued, the fact that Constantinople has a very broad vision helps a great deal in the journey of dialogue toward full communion.

(Photo by Nikos Manginas)

