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Greeting by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew During the Visit of the National Council of Churches in Korea



It is with great joy and love that we welcome you today to our Venerable and Sacred Center—the martyric Church of Constantinople—and we extend to you our heartfelt greetings and prayers for a pleasant stay during your pilgrimage here in the Queen of Cities—a city with a rich and glorious history.

Your visit holds special significance, since today is the feast of the two great Apostles, Peter and Paul. Peter and Paul, despite their differences in origin, education, temperament and mentality, both worked in harmony and steadfast dedication to preach the gospel of salvation in Christ. Their teaching and martyrdom left behind a precious legacy for us Christians to safeguard, and they also serve as an example to imitate, just as all the apostles imitated Christ (1

Corinthians 11: 1).

All of us residing in this City experience the Apostolicity of our Church, as it was through the First-called Apostle Andrew that this Church was founded when he appointed his disciple Stachys as the first Bishop of the city of Byzantium. Later, in 330 AD, Emperor Constantine named this city as the new capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, giving it the official name of New Rome. The Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381) and the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451) granted to our Church the rights and privileges—or even better, the responsibilities—that it has since held in the Christian world. An important characteristic of the significance of the place you are now visiting is the fact that all seven Ecumenical Councils of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of the first millennium, which formulated the doctrinal teaching of the Church, were convened in Constantinople, its surrounding regions, and in Ephesus. Even after the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Ecumenical Patriarchate never ceased to carry the cross of responsibility that the Ecumenical Councils entrusted it with, and to serve the other local Orthodox sister Churches in a sacrificial spirit.

In the last century, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has played a leading role in the Ecumenical Movement for the unity of Christianity. Moreover, through its many initiatives, it has encouraged and promoted interfaith dialogue between Christianity and the other two monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam. Furthermore, the Ecumenical Patriarchate's contribution toward raising public awareness for the protection of the environment has been decisive, since, for the first time, on a global level, it has raised the theological and spiritual dimension of this serious problem for the preservation of God's creation.

Despite the challenges we face, we wholeheartedly believe that it is our duty to preach love, justice and peace. The Orthodox Church has always been a "Church of service." We are determined to continue the struggle for the defense of human rights and for the protection of innocent children and women from all forms of violence and exploitation—all, of course, for the promotion of a culture of solidarity and peaceful coexistence. It is impossible for the Church to close its eyes before evil, to be indifferent to the cry of the poor and oppressed, and to remain calm in the face of the ecological crisis. True Christian faith advances the struggle against all forces of inhumanity. Our uplifted hands of prayer are lowered and become hands of service and charity. "God is love, and whoever experiences this love is in God and God is in them." (1 John 4:16)

We had the great pleasure and honor to visit Korea four times, and we wholeheartedly share in your desire to see this country united. Together with our

prayers, we remain at your side in your righteous struggle for the prevailing of peace on the Korean peninsula, as we always and everywhere endeavor to be ambassadors of reconciliation and lasting peace. And so, please consider the Ecumenical Patriarchate and us personally as a friend and supporter of your beloved homeland.

We conclude our greeting by mentioning two short passages on the theology of peace by our blessed predecessors Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, both Patriarchs of Constantinople. St. Gregory writes that “those who love and desire peace, approach God.” St. Chrysostom states that “if we seek peace, God will be with us,” also adding that “nothing is allowed, neither to say nor to do without peace.”

Dear friends,

Please accept our hospitality as an indication of our sincere and fraternal love for all of you, and as a token of our deep appreciation for the warm reception that you afforded us during our visit to Seoul last December. Our future is common; and the way to this future is a common journey for us all. We wish you a blessed pilgrimage, as well as much success and prosperity in all of your endeavors. May the Grace of the triune God be with you all. Amen.

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