

**SYNODALITY:  
A Common Principle of the Eastern and Western Canonical Traditions &  
its Application in the Orthodox Church Today**

By  
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Παναγιώτατε Πάτερ καί Δέσποτα,  
Your Eminences,  
Your Grace Bishop Massimiliano,  
Reverend fellow Clergymen and Monastics,  
Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord,

I couldn't imagine a more fitting place to talk about the notion of synodality than in the Church, the gathering place of the worshipping community, and in particular in this magnificent Church of the Holy Trinity, because for St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, the Church is identified with the synod (“ἐκκλησία γὰρ συνόδου ἐστὶν ὄνομα” [“for the name of the synod is church”]); *Commentary on Psalm 149*, I), while other Church Fathers link the term “synod” to the Holy Trinity, where it finds its “ultimate foundation,” as the famous *Ravenna Document* highlighted (§5). And I couldn't consider a greater honor than presenting this critical topic in the presence of the *Protos* of the Archdiocese of Constantinople, the *Protos* of the Holy Great Church of Christ, the *Protos* of the Orthodox Church, in the presence of His All-Holiness Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople – New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch, as well as in front of eminent Hierarchs of the Throne, current members of Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, such as the Most Rev. Metropolitan Andreas of Saranta Ekklesiae, but also before the Right Rev. Bishop Massimiliano and our brothers and sisters from the Roman-Catholic community of our City, the first official visit

Tonight's presentation would not have happened without His Grace Bishop Massimiliano's initiative, part of the synodal journey that the Church of Rome began last fall, when on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021, His Holiness Pope Frances formally opened a two-year process called “a synod on synodality,” and officially known as “Synod 2021-2023: For Synodal Church,” focusing on the meaning and purpose of synodality itself. Unlike previous synods of the Roman-Catholic Church, this one has actually begun in dioceses all over the world, with opportunities for public consultations or listening sessions at local parishes through the spring of 2022, drawing local Catholics and national bishops' conferences, religious orders and curial officials into an extended period of discernment that will culminate with an October 2023 assembly in Rome.

In this context, the Vatican has issued a letter asking the Roman-Catholic bishops to invite local Orthodox Hierarchs to participate in the diocesan stage of this two-year process leading to the 2023 Synod on Synodality. The President of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Kurt Koch, has declared that close cooperation with the Orthodox Church, which has a longstanding experience

of synodality, will “have the rewarding possibility of learning a little more about the significance of episcopal collegiality.”

Being in the Queen of Cities, His Grace Bishop Massimiliano has the unique privilege to reach out for guidance and paternal support to the “Canonist Patriarch” Bartholomew. Tonight’s gathering is precisely an expression of His All-Holiness’ unwavering care and affection for our Roman-Catholic brothers and sisters in our City. And I am particularly grateful to His All-Holiness for entrusting me with the significant responsibility to share with you a few thoughts on the principle of synodality and the way it is applied today in the Orthodox Church.

Talking about synodality, I am not introducing a novel Eastern concept to the Western Church, but a common fundamental principle of the canonical traditions of our two sister Churches. It is not coincidental that both the Greek word *σύνδοδος* and the Latin *concilium* started being used to denote church gatherings almost simultaneously and in the same region (North Africa) in the third century. It was Dionysius of Alexandria, who wrote about synods in his letter to Rome, and Tertullian did the same in one of his treatises.

Before the third century no occurrence of the word *σύνδοδος* as “council” can be found in the ecclesiastical writings, including the New Testament, despite the fact that it was frequently employed in classical literature, in the works of philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus, historiographers such as Xenophon, the tragedian Euripides and even the comic-writer Aristophanes. In adopting the word *σύνδοδος* from classical antiquity, the Church demonstrated the same openness as in its identification with the word *ἐκκλησία*. In the classical tradition, the words *σύνδοδος* and *ἐκκλησία* were similar public phenomena, as they both meant “assembly:” the first, any kind of assembly, and the second, the particular assembly of free citizens of a Greek *πόλις*, deciding over the city’s policies. Thus, in the ancient Church, from synodality as a political phenomenon, we are led to synodality as theological one. This intrinsic interconnectedness between the words *σύνδοδος* and *ἐκκλησία*, which as I mentioned in the beginning was highlighted by St. John Chrysostom, was rediscovered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by prominent Orthodox and Roman-Catholic theologians, who showed that the council is not an appendix to the Church, but that Church itself is a council.

The Church used not only terms, but also political and administrative structures of antiquity to organize its councils: the procedures of debating and decision-making were borrowed from the Roman Senate and juridical procedures from the Roman courts. Beyond these procedures, the Church adopted also the democratic ethos of the institutions of antiquity: all the participants in the church councils had equal rights to speak and to vote (*ἰσηγορία*), an important principle of the Athenian *ἐκκλησία*. Moreover, they also came to the councils with the idea that they speak on behalf of their people, participating as representatives of their dioceses. Therefore, they felt accountable to their flocks and considered the consequences of their voting accordingly.

Last but not least, even from an etymological point of view, there is an association between the meaning of the Greek word *σύνδοδος* and the Latin *concilium*. St. Isidore of Seville believed that the word *concilium* comes from *cilium* (an eyelid). To him, the *concilia* were gatherings of people who looked at something together, the Greek equivalent for this term being the word *σύνοψις*. This interpretation of the councils was adopted by the Western Canonists. In the East, the word *σύνδοδος* is formed from the preposition *σύν*, ‘together’, and the

noun ὁδός, ‘path’ or ‘journey’. The root ὁδός gives us a clue to how the councils were perceived in the Christian East in the period of the late antiquity: in order to participate in a council, a bishop had to leave his see and, together with other bishops, to take a way (ὁδός) often long and perilous, to reach his destination, where the council would take place. In this sense, the word *σύνοδος* was synonymous with the word *συνοδοιπóρος*. The coming together of bishops-*συνοδοιπóροι* after a long and dangerous trip was celebrated as their *σύνοδος*.

Synod is, thus, a group of persons – primarily bishops, but also including priests and lay participants – who are engaged in a common pilgrimage, who are journeying together on the same path. This perception reminds us that synods are not static but dynamic, not repetitive but revelatory events in the life of the Church. “Behold, I am making all things new,” proclaims the risen Saviour (Rev. 21:5). Indeed, at every true church council we experience this newness of our unchanging faith.

We may speak likewise of the need to acquire a “synodical mind.” For this reason, when reflecting on synodality, we should envisage it in wide-ranging terms. While it refers in the first instance to the proceedings of actual councils, whether ecumenical or local, it is also to be understood more broadly as a quality extending throughout the Church at every level, in the diocese, in the parish, and in our personal lives. For example, in one of its many ecclesiological studies, the World Council of Churches defined synodality as belonging to the nature of the Church and as a dimension, which the Church “needs both at the local and on all other possible levels.” Similarly, the Ravenna Document stated that “the conciliar dimension of the Church is to be found at the three levels of ecclesial communion, the local, the regional and the universal” (§10).

In the Orthodox context, synodality is practiced on these levels through parish councils, diocesan councils, councils of the local autocephalous Churches, Synaxes of the Primates, Pan-Orthodox Councils and other forms. Similarly, in the context of the “synod of synodality,” before coming together in 2023, the Roman-Catholic Hierarchy around the world is meeting with everyone from parishioners to monks, nuns and Catholic universities, providing opportunities for mutual consultation at every level and among many different church organizations. Our gathering this evening is a clear manifestation of this spirit of synodality, of a “spirituality of fellowship,” openness to the other, a willingness to listen.

From an historical point of view, the earliest form of synodality was the network of communities established by the Apostles. We may have an idea what kind of networks these might be from the Pauline communities. These communities shared common memories about their founders and stories told by them. Those memories and stories were told and communicated through the network and to other networks. This is how the earliest Christian Scriptures emerged. Apostolic letters constituted the largest part of the canon of the New Testament. They were precisely written as a means of communication, or conciliarity, within and between these networks. They were so closely connected with the networks, that they were even named after the founders of the networks, such as some Pauline epistles, which were not written by Paul. Even the Gospels were composed within particular networks and circulated through them. Therefore, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to call the New Testament as fruit of synodality.

Nevertheless, in a form of “the chicken or the egg casualty dilemma” synodality is visualized through two particular Scriptural events mentioned in the Book of Acts. The first one is Pentecost. (Acts 2). In Byzantine iconography, councils are depicted as being in the image of the iconography of Pentecost. The Paraclete descended on the first disciples in Jerusalem, not when each was praying separately on his own, but when “they were all together in one place” (“ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό;” Acts 2:1)? Indeed, despite the profound value that solitude possesses, solidarity and togetherness – along with all that is meant by the Russian term *sobornost* – is yet more precious. The Church is not a conglomeration of self-contained monads, but a body with many limbs, organically interdependent. When gathered in council, we sinners become something more than what we are as isolated individuals; and this ‘something more’ is exactly the presence of Christ Himself, active among us through the grace of the Holy Spirit. As our Lord has promised, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in their midst” (Matt. 18:20). It is this dominical affirmation that validates every true council. For the Christian faith, synodality is therefore not human-centered, but Christ-centered and is not dependent on the judicial achievements of an institution – great though they may be – but on “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.” It is for this reason that the Council is named “Ἁγία Σύνοδος” (Holy Council): not on account of its virtues, but because it is related to the most holy God.

That is why, at every level of ecclesial life, and not least at every council, the members of the Church say not ‘I’ but ‘we’, not ‘me’ but ‘us’. ‘Us’ is the decisive synodical word. “It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us,” stated the disciples at the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:28), which is the second Scriptural event that became a model for all the future councils. This council was attended by the Apostles and is the only event of this sort known in the first century. It was about how to receive to the Christian communities people without Jewish background. Effectively, the issue was whether the Church should open itself to the Roman world or should it remain confined within the Jewish setting.

In people’s mind the notion of synodality often appears to be linked to static, legalistic and formal criteria. Nevertheless, the Apostles were not hesitant to get together and – “after there had been much debate” (πολλῆς ζητήσεως γενομένης; Acts 15:7) – they innovated about the most pressing issues of their time, accepting, thus, the universal mission of the Church. We usually call the Apostolic Synod “a council sui generis,” but the truth is that it was the foundation of all future innovation in the life of the Church.

More over, from these two Scriptural models becomes apparent that the aim of every council is, through the exercise of collective discernment, to attain a common mind. How is this exercise of collective discernment accomplished? What holds the Church together and makes it one? To answer that, let us recall what happened immediately after the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, when three thousand converts were baptized. “They devoted themselves,” St. Luke tells us, “to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers” (Acts 2:42). Here, then, is the distinctive and unique function of the Church: to “break bread,” to offer the mystical Sacrifice that is without shedding of blood, to celebrate the Lord’s Supper “until He comes again” (1 Cor. 11:2).

It is the Eucharist that forms the life-giving source that holds the Church together and makes it one Body in Christ. Ecclesial unity is not imposed from

above by power of jurisdiction, but it is created from within by communion in the sacramental Body and Blood of the risen Lord. The Church's very name (*ἐκκλησία*) has a eucharistic reference: it means "assembly," yet not simply any kind of assembly, but specifically the worshipping assembly, the People of God "called out" and gathered for the offering of the Divine Liturgy. It is no coincidence that the phrase "Body of Christ" has a double meaning, signifying both the community and the sacrament. The Church is essentially a eucharistic organism, and when she celebrates the Divine Liturgy, then and only then does she become what she truly is. As Cardinal Henri de Lubac insisted, the Church makes the Eucharist, and the Eucharist makes the Church.

I would regard eucharistic ecclesiology, despite the criticisms to which it has been subject, as the most creative element in modern Christian thinking. And it is precisely from this point of view that we should approach the theme of synodality. It should be interpreted, not simply in institutional and juridical terms, as a mere expression of governance and power, but primarily in a mystery and sacramental context.

We can see at once the way in which a church council is to be regarded as a eucharistic event. Most councils have been concerned with the restoration and confirmation of eucharistic communion (*κοινωνία*) when this has been broken, with the question who may or may not be admitted to receive the sacrament; and most (if not all) councils have concluded with a concelebrated Liturgy, embracing all the members. Therefore, the main theme of the canons of the ancient council is the restoration to full communion of those excommunicated (*τῶν ἀκοινωνήτων*).

It is not an overstatement to say that none of the Councils understood their task to be that of providing a systematic exposition of the faith. On the contrary, the function of the council in the Church was and remains a confession of the faith, as participation in the charismatic life of the Church, a communion in faith in the Eucharist through the panegyric acceptance of those who correctly believe in Christ, something that is affirmed in the Eucharistic unity, and in the cutting off from the body of the Church of all those who deviate from the faith, sanctioned by Eucharistic excommunication.

Returning now to our historical overview, the Apostolic Synod set a precedent for other councils, which began gathering from the second century onwards. Among the earliest issues that caused councils to be convened in the post-apostolic era, were Montanism and the date of celebration of Pascha, an issue that, regrettably, still keeps our sister Churches away from celebrating the greatest feast of our faith on the same day. The common features of these councils were irregularity, absence of unified procedures, and the Church taking sole responsibility for their convocation, logistics, agenda and proceedings. Last but not least, such councils were not exclusively episcopal affairs. For example, in one of the earliest records we have of a council, various bishops and other clergy- and laymen had gathered together to assess the faith of a certain Heraclides; and to do so they invited the presbyter Origen to lead the discussion, not only to help, but also to "teach" those who were there, including the bishops. Similarly, in Antioch in 268: after repeated meetings to investigate the case of Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch, those gathered found that they were not able to solve the problem, so they eventually invited Malchion, the head of the school of rhetoric in the city, to come to unmask Paul's pernicious heresy.

The following century, however, things had changed. In the beginning of the fourth century, when the Christian Church became established, to use the modern term, and please forgive me for the anachronism, this recognition by *imperium Romanum* affected the forms of its conciliarity. The Councils became episcopal-centered. For instance, at the council of Antioch in 341, the bishops gathered together refuted the charge of being “Arians” by asking indignantly: “how can we as bishops [be said to] follow a presbyter,” referring to Arius. The Councils tried to secure as wide participation as possible, engaging bishops from every corner of the *ecumene* (*inhabited world*). This became possible owing to the sponsorship of the State. The Empire not only facilitated the logistics and paid for their expenses, but also in many cases contributed, through the imperial chancellery, to the formation of their agenda. Moreover, especially after Justinian, the decisions of the councils were enforced by the imperial power, which promulgated them as State laws, leading to their quick and effective implementation. For all these reasons, we could call these councils as “imperial” in order to distinguish them from the previous category of councils, which could be named as “ad hoc.” Among the imperial councils, which have been received by the Orthodox Church, are listed the Seven Ecumenical Councils, as well as a series of local councils, whose canons form part of the *corpus canonum* of the Eastern canonical tradition.

During the time of the “imperial” Councils the conciliar institute of Pentarchy made also its appearance in the fifth and sixth centuries, as a way of preserving the Church and society in Byzantium divided by the Christological controversies. Pentarchy was institutionalized as a fellowship of the Patriarchs of the five major ancient sees: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem. They were in touch with each other through correspondence and personal meetings. Their consent over doctrinal, ethical and canonical issues played a leading role in coordinating the efforts of the local Churches, when there were no Councils.

The era of the “imperial” councils ended, when the State in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire declined. In the late Byzantine and Ottoman period, the councils gradually returned to the “ad hoc” format they had before Constantine. Some of them were larger, like the three fourteenth-century Palamite Councils at Constantinople (1341, 1347, 1351), and some smaller. A smaller type of the *ἐνδημοῦσα* synod became typical for this period. *Ἐνδημοῦσα* means that this is a gathering of the hierarchs who happen to be in the city, where the council is convened. This city was Constantinople, which never had lack of bishops in residence, as is the case today as well. There were even Patriarchs from the other three Thrones of the East (Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem) staying permanently in the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Such councils were convened and presided over by the Ecumenical Patriarch, who played a key role in them and their decisions had significance for all the local Orthodox Churches. Among the latest and most remarkable councils of this type was the Council of Constantinople (1872) that condemned ethnophyletism (regrettably its teaching is not observed in the contemporary Orthodox diaspora).

Other “ad hoc” councils, but of local character, were the seventeenth-century councils, notably at Iași (1642) and at Jerusalem (1672), which affirmed the true Orthodox teaching concerning the Church and the sacraments; and more recently the Moscow Council of 1917-18, which was attended by priests and laity

as well as bishops, but was tragically cut short by the Bolshevik Revolution. Without underestimating all these and other councils, we should admit that all too often Orthodoxy finds it singularly difficult to act in a conciliar way. We Orthodox are accustomed to speak of ourselves as the conciliar Church par excellence, as the Church of the seven Holy Councils. But we have to confess, with humility and realism, that while we affirm synodality in theory, all too often we have neglected it in practice, experiencing what can be called “conciliar fatigue.”

How many years of preparation and postponement elapsed before the Holy and Great Council actually met in Crete during 2016! In the Roman Catholic Church, on 25 January 1959 the late Pope John XXIII, to the astonishment of almost everyone, announced the summoning of an Ecumenical Council; and in less than four years, on 11 October 1962, the Council actually began. I am afraid that this is not the way in which things happened in the Orthodox Church. As long ago as 1902 Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III of blessed memory sent an Encyclical Letter to all the Orthodox Churches, calling for closer contacts and cooperation. This Letter received a favourable reception. Here we have the seed that led eventually to the Holy and Great Council of 2016; but it was a really long time (more than a century!) before this seed finally bore fruit, signalling a period of “conciliar renaissance.”

As the Holy and Great Council was envisaged in its preparatory phases, it was to meet for its own sake, namely for the sake of synodality, very much like the ongoing Roman-Catholic Synod on Synodality. The Orthodox Church wanted, thus, to prove that conciliarity is not just a formula, but a condition and way of living. What the Holy and Great Council of Crete has actually done was to reaffirm the synodical spirit of Orthodoxy, its conciliar ethos, becoming an authentic voice of synodality in our days. And this is credited by all the Council participants, above all, to the stirring leadership and remarkable persistence of the President of the Council, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

The Holy and Great Council adopted six documents. Of particular importance for our topic is the one on “The Orthodox Diaspora.” In this document the Fathers of the Council first noted the failure in the western world to observe the canonical rule of one ruling bishop in each place, an anomaly for which we have all been lamenting for the last hundred years. Then they rightly commended the establishment of an Episcopal Assembly of all the canonically recognized Orthodox bishops in each area of the Diaspora, “chaired by the first among the hierarchs of the Church of Constantinople,” “until the appropriate time arrives when all the conditions exist in order to apply the canonical exactness.” Despite the failure of establishing local synods in each of these regions, due to the decision that “the bishops will continue to be subject to the same canonical jurisdictions to which they are subject today,” i.e. namely to their Mother Churches, the institution of the Episcopal Assemblies was created in order to conciliarity manifest the unity of the Orthodox Church in the Diaspora. Unfortunately, this unity has been seriously hampered, after the decision of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Moscow to unilaterally break communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in response to the granting of autocephalous status to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and to withdraw its members from all the inter-Orthodox and inter-Christian collective bodies, which are presided by Hierarchs of the Ecumenical Throne.

This decision is a clear manifestation of the reality that Orthodox conciliarism is not that triumphant. On the contrary, it demonstrates symptoms of

crisis, such as the absence from the Holy and Great Council, at the very last moment, of four (out of the then fourteen) local Orthodox Churches, which not only had agreed to participate, but they had also co-signed all the relevant pre-conciliar documents. This sorrowful absence proved that more effective than the institute of the Panorthodox Council has been another institute, the Synaxis of the Primates. This is a new institution, which was introduced by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew soon after His election to the see of Constantinople, meeting for the first time in 1992 and since then several other times, the last of which being January 2016. The Synaxis brings together the primates of all the local Orthodox Churches, resembling the ancient institute of the Pentarchy, but in no way substituting it. Actually, during the tenure of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the Synaxis of the Primates of the now four ancient Patriarchates of the East, the “Tertarchy,” as we could call it, after the rapture of communion with the Church of Rome, met already once in 2014, and their privileged status in relation to the Primates of the newer autocephalous Churches has been highlighted, especially since this status entails unique responsibilities. The role of the Synaxis of all the Primates was to prepare the Panorthodox Council. However, in reality, the Synaxis turned out to be the most reliable manifestation of conciliarity during the pre-synodal period due to its flexibility and quick action.

“It is meet and right” to praise Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew for His efforts and accomplishments to strengthen synodality not only at the inter-Orthodox-universal level, but also at the local and regional level, within the jurisdictional borders of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. His All-Holiness is the inspirer of the Synaxis of the Primates, but He is also the one who institutionalized the so-called Synaxes of all the Hierarchs of the Ecumenical Throne, initially every two years and currently every three years, with the latest of which taking place just last September 2021. The institution of the Synaxis of the Hierarchy Throne emerged out of the prohibition imposed by the Turkish Authorities, shortly after the creation of the modern Republic of Turkey, to all the non-Turkish citizen Hierarchs of the Throne from participating in the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The latter consisted, thus, only from Hierarchs with Turkish citizenship, residing in the country. The Synaxes of the Throne, introduced first by Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of blessed memory, was an opportunity to unite the mutilated body of the Hierarchy of the Holy Great Church of Christ.

However, after the historical decision taken by the Holy and Sacred Synod, upon recommendation of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2004, to call as full members of the Synod Hierarchs from Eparchies of the Throne outside of Turkey, restoring, thus, the canonical function of the synodal institution, along with the introduction of the annual synodal term of service and the partial replacement by half of the members of the Synod every six months, the institution of the Synaxis of the Hierarchy changed its purpose. Ever since, the aim of the Synaxes is to preserve, undisrupted, the ecclesiastical communication between those Hierarchs from the Metropolises of the Throne in the so-called “New Lands,” i.e. in Northern Greece, whose administration was delegated in 1928 to the Autocephalous Church of Greece, and who were in serious danger of being distant from their canonical center, with the Phanar, which still retains the ultimate spiritual authority upon them.

The significant contribution of His All-Holiness to the safeguarding and further advancement of conciliarity at the local, regional and inter-Orthodox level fully justifies the desire of His spiritual Father, the late Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon, to “make him a bishop quickly, in order to be tried and tested,” in other words, in order to be able to immerse himself into the synodal spirit of the Great Church. Something that the young Metropolitan Bartholomew of Philadelphia did, and he continued doing as Elder Metropolitan of Chalcedon, and for 31 years now as Ecumenical Patriarch. Indeed, the Holy Great Church of Christ, under the wise and robust guidance of Patriarch Bartholomew does not take synodality for granted. On the contrary, it permanently applies great effort to make conciliarity not just an elegant formula of its identity, but a working engine of the life of the Church at all levels: at the local level with diocesan synods, such as the Holy Eparchial Synod of the Church in Crete or of the Holy Archdiocese of America, at the regional level with the Holy Synods of the two autonomous Churches under the Ecumenical Patriarchate (Finland and Estonia), and foremost with the Patriarchal Holy and Sacred Synod, and at the universal level with the Presidency of the Synaxis of the Primates and the “Tetrarchy” of the Eastern Patriarchs, as well as of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church. In this way, the Mother Church of Constantinople teaches by example that synodality is indeed intrinsic to the Orthodox tradition and a cause, which should be fought for by all on an everyday basis.

Παναγιώτατε Πάτερ καί Δέσποτα,  
Your Eminences,  
Your Graces,  
Dear friends,

The Ravenna Agreed Statement affirmed that “in order for there to be full ecclesial communion, there must be between our Churches reciprocal recognition of canonical legislations in their legitimate diversities” (§16). Fortunately, in the case of synodality there is no need for mutual recognition, because as I have shown in my presentation, this has been a common fundamental principle in the canonical traditions of our two Churches from the very beginning. Instead of mutual recognition, it actually requires mutual enrichment of its practical application with more similar events like this one. Only through strengthening synodality, we will be able to accomplish our full communion, because the zenith of conciliarity offers our Churches the most visible and tangible union – Eucharist and doctrinal unity in Christ and the Holy Spirit – constituting, thus, a true portrayal of Pentecost.<sup>3</sup>

As we approach for the Holy and Great Pascha, all of us gathered here this evening implore Your All-Holiness to pray that it won't be that far the day when our two sister Churches will be able to celebrate together the “feast of feasts” not as a mere consequence of coinciding calendars, but as a deliberate decision of our two Churches to transcend the mere habit of separation, learnt from centuries of being out of communion, highlighting the common rule of faith as an authentic expression of our shared Christian identity.

