

# HIS HOLINESS POPE TAWADROS II VISITS

## HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

On the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary  
Of the Historic Meeting of their Predecessors,  
Pope Saint Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III

### THE SPEECH OF H.H. POPE TAWADROS II

On MAY 11th, 2023

“Let us not love in word or in tongue,  
but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

My brother, Your Holiness Pope Francis,  
Your Graces, the honorable audience,

Christ is risen... Truly, He is risen!



Today, my joy is great in being among you, and I shake hands with you with my heart, not just only with my hands. I rejoice with you in Christ, who is risen from the dead, and I thank you for giving us the opportunity to pay you a visit. I am grateful to be on this land, in which the apostles preached and which was inhabited by St.

Mark, the apostle who brought the faith to Egypt. From it, many embarked on a long journey to proclaim the name of our Lord Jesus to the whole world as a Redeemer and Savior.

Let us contemplate what St Paul the Apostle wrote from here in Rome to the Ephesians: “That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width, length, depth, and height” (Eph 3:17–18). It is love, dearly-beloved, the permanent foundation, and the main path to perfection. And the only way to God, because God is love, and everyone who knows Him walks the steps of love with Him and to Him.

I see the world as a large circle with God at its center, and each of us as a point on the circle. Whenever we get closer to God, the center of the circle, we find ourselves getting closer automatically. We understand each other due to our proximity to the divine light, and our love grows daily due to our proximity to God’s love.

It is a long path that we walk together towards God, who said, “I am the way” (John 14:6), to the extent that during certain periods we were called the followers of the way because we follow Him. Thus, “Enoch walked with God” (Gen 5:24). And “Noah walked with God” (Gen 6:9), and Abraham, David, the two disciples of Emmaus, and many others. Everyone who walked with Him and took Him as a traveling companion on the road rejoiced.

As for the breadth, length, depth, and height of this love, it is infinite because it is from God and cannot be measured. It is our responsibility to become like Him and offer unconditional love to each other and to the whole world.

One of the signs of the path of love for every human being is your issuance of the new constitution, “the proclamation of the Gospel,” on which I congratulate you because it testifies to your attention to all aspects of humanity.

During the dialogue sessions between the two churches, the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church, we are walking on the path of love, “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:2).

In our modern era, mutual visits began between our churches in 1962, followed by the visit of Pope Shenouda III to the See of Rome in May 1973, hosted by His Holiness Pope Paul VI. During this visit, His Holiness received part of the relics of Saint Athanasius during the celebration of the 16th anniversary of his departure. He was the Coptic Pope of the fourth century. His Holiness Pope Paul VI said in his celebratory speech, “Saint Athanasius is a father and teacher of the universal Church.”

On May 10, 1973, the two heads of our churches signed a joint statement in which it was agreed to form a joint committee, “whose mission is to direct joint studies in the fields of church tradition, patristic science, liturgies, theology, history, and scientific issues, so that we can declare together the means of the gospel that

correspond to the authentic message of the Lord and to the needs and hopes of today's world.”

We thank God for the continuation of the theological dialogue of the Joint International Committee between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches (Oriental), which honored us by conducting its last meeting at the Logos Center, the papal headquarters in Egypt, and which we will commemorate next year at its twentieth meeting.

This is how the dialogue started and continues. Dialogue is a long but safe path, guarded by two sides of love: the side of Christ's love for us and the side of our love for each other. Therefore, no matter what challenges we face, love protects us, so that we may continue our path towards mutual understanding with prayer as our guiding principle in order to support each other. Bearing our responsibility and putting before us the words of John the Beloved, “Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

And just as the saints are one of the main pillars of our churches, starting with the apostles Peter, Paul, and Mark, we now also write in the book of the church “The Synaxarium” about new martyrs who preserved the faith, held witness to Christ, and did not relent in the face of torture and persecution, thus setting a living example for us in the true testimony of God: “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil 1:29).

These are the 21 martyrs in Libya; we recognize them as saints in the Coptic Orthodox Church, and we celebrate on the 8th of Amshir every year—which corresponds to the 15th of February—the Feast of the Martyrs of the Modern Era who were martyred during recent years. Today we present part of their belongings immersed in their blood, which was shed on the name of Christ, to the Church, so that they may be remembered in “The Synaxarium” of all the Churches in the world, knowing that “We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1), who have become role models and contemporary examples for the whole world, testifying that our Christianity is not a history in the past, but it is yesterday, today, and forever.

Finally, I thank Your Holiness for inviting me and the accompanying delegation and for the kind words of welcome with which you received us, in your name and in the name of all of you. I remember you in my personal prayers daily, as we pledged during my last visit. I pray that God will give you perfect health, long life, and lasting joy, and I pray with you for the sake of the Church of God on earth, for Him to establish it unto the end of ages, so that it may always raise heavenly praise and that He may guard it with His care that does not slumber or sleep, and that He blesses us all forever. Amen.

# THE SPEECH OF H.H. POPE FRANCIS

On MAY 11th, 2023

## **May our friendship never stop growing**

Your Holiness! Dear brothers in Christ!

“This is the day that the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it!”. It was with this Paschal acclamation, fifty years ago, that Pope Saint Paul VI welcomed your venerable predecessor, Pope Shenouda III, to Saint Peter’s Basilica. It is with the same acclamation that I welcome you today, beloved brother and dear friend Tawadros. I thank you from my heart for accepting my invitation to commemorate together the jubilee of this historic event in 1973, as well as the tenth anniversary of our first meeting in 2013.

In the ecumenical journey, it is important always to look *ahead*. Cultivating in the heart a healthy impatience and an ardent desire for unity, we must be, like the apostle Paul, “straining forward to what lies ahead” (cf Phil 3:13), and continually asking ourselves, “*Quanta est nobis via?*” – How far do we still have to go? However, it is also necessary to remember, especially in times of discouragement, to rejoice in the path already travelled and to draw on the fervor of the pioneers who have gone before us. Looking ahead and remembering. Yet, it is undoubtedly all the more incumbent on us to look up, to thank the Lord for the steps we have taken and to beseech Him to give us the gift of the longed-for unity.

To thank and to supplicate. This is the purpose of our commemoration today. The meeting of our Predecessors, which took place in Rome from 9 to 13 May 1973, marked a historic milestone in relations between the See of Saint Peter and the See of Saint Mark. It was the first meeting between a Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church and a Bishop of Rome. It also marked the end of a theological dispute dating back to the Council of Chalcedon, thanks to the signing on 10 May 1973 of a memorable joint Christological declaration, which later served as an inspiration for similar agreements with the other Eastern Orthodox Churches.

The meeting led to the creation of the joint international commission between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church, which in 1979 adopted the pioneering *Principles to guide the search for unity between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church*, signed by Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Shenouda III, which stated in prophetic words that “the unity we envision does not mean the absorption of one by the other or the domination of one over the other. It is at the service of each one to help him or her better live out the specific gifts he or she has received from the Spirit of God”.

This joint Commission then opened the way to the birth of a fruitful dialogue between the Catholic Church and the entire family of eastern Orthodox Churches, which held its first meeting in 2004 in Cairo, hosted by His Holiness Shenouda. I thank the Coptic Orthodox Church for its commitment to this theological dialogue. I am also grateful to His Holiness for the fraternal attention he continues to pay to the Coptic Catholic Church, proximity that found praiseworthy expression in the creation of *the National Council of Christian Churches* in Egypt.

As can be seen, the meeting of our distinguished Predecessors has never ceased to bear fruit in the journey of our Churches towards full communion. It is also in remembrance of the 1973 meeting that Your Holiness came to me for the first time on 10 May 2013, a few months after your enthronement and a few weeks after the beginning of my pontificate. On that occasion, you proposed to celebrate every 10 May as the “Day of friendship between Copts and Catholics”, which since then is punctually celebrated by our Churches.

When speaking of friendship, I am reminded of the famous eighth-century Coptic icon depicting the Lord resting his hand on the shoulder of his friend, the holy monk Mena of Egypt. This icon is sometimes called the “icon of friendship” because the Lord seems to want to accompany his friend and walk with him. Similarly, the bonds of friendship between our Churches are rooted in the friendship of Jesus Christ Himself with all His disciples whom He calls “friends” (cf John 15:15), and whom He accompanies on their journey, as He did with the pilgrims of Emmaus.

In this journey of friendship we are also accompanied by the martyrs, who testify that “no one has greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15:13). I have no words to express my gratitude for the precious gift of a relic of the Coptic martyrs killed in Libya on 15 February 2015. These martyrs were baptized not only in water and the Spirit, but also in blood, with a blood that is a seed of unity for all followers of Christ. I am pleased to announce today that, with Your Holiness' consent, these twenty-one martyrs will be included in the *Roman Martyrology* as a sign of the spiritual communion uniting our two Churches.

May the prayers of the Coptic martyrs, united with those of the *Theotokos*, continue to make our Churches grow in friendship, until the blessed day when we will be able to celebrate together at the same altar and commune with the same Body and Blood of the Savior, “that the world may believe” (John 17:21)!

