

Feast of St. Andrew in Istanbul

To my great surprise, Thanksgiving Day saw me in the air en route to Turkey - and, to anticipate a question, there was no turkey on the menu during the flight that evening! The day before, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Holy See's Secretary of State, was on the telephone from Rome. He had seen the Holy Father a few minutes before we spoke and now conveyed to me the wish of Pope John Paul II that I represent him in Istanbul on the Feast of St. Andrew, Patron of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the ancient See of Constantinople. So began my retracing of the steps of our own Lawrence Cardinal Shehan 33 years ago. At the close of the Second Vatican Council he took to the Phanar, headquarters of the Patriarchate, the decree of Pope Paul VI which struck "from the memory of the Church" the excommunication leveled by a papal legate against the ecumenical patriarch some 900 years earlier. In 1965, Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras was ready to act in concert with the Pope and to revoke a like excommunication which had been issued by his predecessor against the papal envoy in 1054. My own mission continued the regular official contacts between the Churches of the East and West normally carried out on the Catholic side by the President of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy, the Council's President, was busy in Rome as a President Delegate of the Synod for Oceania and I went as a substitute for him. With me in the delegation were Bishop Pierre Duprey, Secretary of the Unity Council, and Father Johan Bonny, an able young staff member from Belgium. A fourth member of our group was at the Istanbul airport to welcome us, Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata, the Apostolic Nuncio to Turkey. We had met once before, when he came to the United States in 1987 as the secretary to Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, then Secretary of State, and we gathered in the residence of the Holy See's Permanent Observer to the United Nations for a meeting very helpful in opening up lines of communication with the world Jewish leadership in preparation for the Holy Father's visit here later that

year. Our work began next morning, Saturday, following our Catholic celebration of Mass at the Nunciature. Archbishop Celata reminded us that Archbishop Angelo Roncalli, later Pope John XXIII, had lived many years in that residence and he showed us the major improvements made in the building during the Roncalli days. By 9:30 a.m. we were at the Patriarchate, and soon were ushered into the office of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who received us very warmly and with a personal word of welcome for each of us. Our Catholic group then went to another, formal meeting room, where the Commission of the Holy Synod which considers relationships with our Church awaited us. Their senior member, Metropolitan Chrysostom of Ephesus, invited me to offer the opening prayer and then we sat together, as co-presidents of the joint working group, for discussions which lasted for about eight hours. A welcome break for luncheon with the Ecumenical Patriarch which interrupted these sessions for about an hour. The exchanges offered us the opportunity to report on the positive progress made in recent months in implementing the agreed statement between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches at Balamand, Lebanon in 1993. Joint committees of our two Churches in Romania and Ukraine are dealing with the sensitive issues which arose following the collapse of Communism and the return of religious freedom to Eastern and Central Europe. We spoke also of how our Churches are preparing for the Great Jubilee of the year 2000. The Orthodox were pleased to learn that Pope John Paul II has agreed to the Ecumenical Patriarch's proposal to observe August 6 of that year, the Feast of the Transfiguration in both East and West, as a day of special prayer and reflection. Next day, the First Sunday of Advent, saw our delegation at the Catholic Cathedral of the Holy Spirit for a Eucharist which was tr