

International Joint Commission Mass

With great joy I extend a welcome to this Basilica, the first cathedral of our land and the mother church of Catholicism in the United States. To those of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church I extend a warm and prayerful welcome.

On October 8, 1995, Pope John Paul II visited Baltimore. He prayed before this altar and, at Oriole Park at Camden Yards, celebrated the Eucharist. The chalice he used then we shall use this evening. It was a gift of his predecessor, Pope Pius VII to Archbishop Ambrose Marechal in 1822.

On October 23, 1997, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew visited this church, where he presided at and preached during a Service of the Word in this sanctuary, speaking from the venerable archbishops' chair. On that occasion, I told him that, please God, some day this International Dialogue would come to Maryland and here there would be a very special welcome. And this has been the case.

This afternoon the members of the Dialogue began their visit to Baltimore at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral which honors the Mother of God, Theotokos, under the title of her Annunciation, recalling when, 2000 years ago, the Word became flesh in the Incarnation. This is the great mystery we celebrate during this Jubilee Year. Now in this historic church we recall the Dormition of Mary, her entering into a full share of her Risen Son's victory over death. We are delighted that so many of God's people join us for this time of prayer.

(Amos 7:12-15) The first reading is from the Prophet Amos. It tells us of a prophet's vocation. This is not a call to predict the future but rather to proclaim the Lord's word, to lift up the promise of divine pardon and grace, the call to change one's ways, to be converted in one's heart to a simplicity of walking before the Lord. This vocation was not one that Amos welcomed. And in our day of complexity and confusion, the prophet's vocation is not an easy one.

(Ephesians 1:3-14) To give us fresh encouragement, the Church offers us an uplifting, inspiring message from the Apostle Paul in the second reading. His is a sweeping vision of God's mercy in choosing and calling us "to be holy and without blemish before him." Clearly this is already God's doing in our lives. It is a reality we come to when we pierce through the static which surrounds us. St. Paul put it this way, "In him we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of transgression, in accord with the riches of grace he has lavished on us."

(Mark 6:7-13) In the gospel passage, the Twelve were charged to go forth on a mission Jesus gave them. They went forth also endowed with power. We hear how they "drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them." Jesus sent the Twelve to bring peace and to preach repentance. Their task has its parallels today.

We come together seeking in the Lord's presence to be touched by divine power and to pray for unity and peace. Around the world people are praying for peace in the Holy Land, for the guidance of the Holy Spirit on those leaders of nations who have been meeting in our state this past week to work for the peace of Jerusalem and that whole region. At the same time, many have been supporting with prayer the International Commission and our work for peace and more visible unity in the Christian family of faith. We are much encouraged by the personal messages of prayer and support from Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

Cardinal Lawrence Shehan, who shepherded the Archdiocese of Baltimore during the years of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), was sent by Pope Paul VI to Istanbul in December 1965, as president of a pontifical delegation. Another member of that delegation is present with us today—Father John Long of the Society of Jesus, a Catholic participant in the International Joint Commission.

In Istanbul