

Visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

Just days ago Baltimore rejoiced at the extraordinary visit of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. Some remarkable aspects of his visit deserve reporting now. The media accounts accurately describe the sense of prayer, excitement and the love of unity in the making during the historic prayer service at the Basilica of the Assumption. To the Patriarch I am most grateful for his great generosity of time and energy. From the moment he arrived in Baltimore he was almost constantly on the go, leading the splendid worship service at the Cathedral of the Annunciation, participating in two functions at City Hall, and presiding at a convention hall luncheon in his honor before coming to the Basilica. From the Basilica we went to The Walters Art Gallery where Dr. Gary Vikan welcomed Patriarch Bartholomew and, in the display of Byzantine art, lifted up a magnificent chalice from the East, whose carefully wrought lines reflected the silversmith's own love for the Eucharist. With much patience the Patriarch then greeted visitors, many of them from Annunciation parish, and all of them visibly moved. At this point I want to underscore my deep gratitude to the Patriarch for having responded so fully to my written request that he speak to us who live in a culture permeated by secularism about how the Orthodox Christian Church nourishes the prayer life of her members. In his reflections, the Patriarch emphasized that Orthodox spirituality is "liturgical, sacramental and eucharistic." Immediately afterwards I told him that Catholic spirituality can be described in the identical way. He agreed and noted that, with a common viewpoint here, we have found an issue which already unites us. At supper I repeated his remarks before the bishops and theologians gathered in my residence. These words and gifts symbolizing our gratitude for his visit here were met by the Patriarch's very warm address, printed in *The Catholic Review* last week. The

address gave great encouragement to all engaged in the work of dialogue between our two Churches. Patriarch Bartholomew also indicated that he looked forward to receiving the Catholic-Orthodox pilgrimage which Greek Orthodox Archbishop Spyridon of America and I will lead to the ancient Sees of Rome and Constantinople in the next few years, God willing, and he insistently invited me to be his guest next year at the Patriarchate in Istanbul. Very significantly, Patriarch Bartholomew told me of his intention to convene in December Archbishop Stylianos of Australia and the other Orthodox members of the International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between our Churches. This is a critical step for the serious resumption of the talks, which have been impeded recently by the confusion in Eastern and Central Europe following the collapse of Communism and the emergence of religious freedom in the region. In a New York television interview, the Patriarch announced the coming intra-Orthodox meeting, giving public reason for us to hope that an assembly of the full International Commission in Maryland may come to pass by the time of the new Millennium.