

Your Beatitude, Venerable Archbishop of Athens and of All Greece,
Honourable Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, (Kyriakos
Mitsotakis)

Your Excellency the Minister for Culture and Sport, (Styliani-Lina
Mendonni),

Eminences, Excellencies,

Dear Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic to the Holy See,

Dear Ambassadors, Authorities and Officials,

Dear Director of this illustrious Museum of the Acropolis,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

His Holiness Pope Francis wished that our delegation present at this memorable ceremony should represent the Dicastery responsible for fraternal relations between the Churches – Monsignor Andrea Palmieri and myself, the eminent Director of the Vatican Museums, Dr Barbara Jatta, and the Apostolic Nuncio to Greece, His Excellency Archbishop Jan Romeo Pawlowski. In this way, the gifting of the fragments of the Parthenon, which have been held in the Vatican Museums for more than two centuries, shows itself as an ecclesial, cultural and social gesture of friendship and solidarity with the people of Greece.

The decision of Pope Francis to give these fragments to Your Beatitude matured in the context of his fraternal relations with the Orthodox Church, and specifically of his meeting with Your Beatitude during his visit to Greece in December 2021. The gesture therefore has particular significance in affirming ever more strongly the friendship and spiritual closeness between our Churches. Pope Francis wishes me to convey to Your Beatitude and to the whole body of the Church of Greece his warmest greetings and prayerful good wishes.

The fragments, representing three different elements of the decoration of the world famous Athenian Temple, have now returned to their original homeland. People of goodwill can see in this event the expression of a shared hope that our diverse cultures, and art itself, will always be a privileged means of dialogue and encounter among peoples. In that exchange, we enrich each other, in the wonderful diversity of our

histories, our achievements and the universal aspiration to peace and fraternity. The meeting of different cultures can be the medium that allows the human family to flourish in respect for our differences and sensibilities.

We must hope that from the encounter between peoples and their cultures – of which the homecoming of the Parthenon fragments is one eloquent sign - will spring the understanding and solidarity that leads to peace. Today, sadly, we are witnesses of the lack of peace in the world, especially as it affects our own continent, Europe. Hopefully, with God's help, the goodwill that inspires this event will spread and grow until – in the vision of the prophet Isaiah -- swords shall be turned into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks; until nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall there be war any more (cfr. Isaiah 2:4).

Conveying once more the greetings of His Holiness Pope Francis and, through all of you, thanking the Orthodox Church of Greece and the Hellenic State for the warmth and generosity of the hospitality given our Vatican delegation, we assure you of our intimate joy at the realization of your legitimate wish to have the Parthenon fragments at home in their place of origin. Thank you.