Greetings
On the Solemnity of SS Peter and Paul, the Apostles
St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church
Wednesday, June 29, 2011

Very Rev. Archimandrite
Dr. Panteleimon Manoussakis

Your Excellency, Bishop Walter,

Father David Michael,

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is my privilege, honor and joy to be with you at this lovely community of St Joseph's as we celebrate the solemnity of feast of Saints Peter and Paul.

I come "burdened" with the honor of representing the spiritual leader of the Orthodox faithful in New England, His Eminence Metropolitan of Boston Methodios, who, although He cannot be with us today, nevertheless is united with us in prayer.

His Eminence's commitment to these occasions for common prayer with His brothers and sisters of the Catholic Church, counts many years. Through these years these occasions have been formalized to sacred and official traditions held in common by the two Churches here in Boston—reflecting on the local level the exchange of visits between the Holy Father and the Ecumenical Patriarch on the universal level.

Thus, every year during Holy Week Metropolitan Methodios will visit His Eminence Sean Cardinal O'Malley, a visit that His Eminence promptly reciprocates on Easter. And on the feast of St Andrew, brother of Peter and founder and patron of the See of Constantinople, we the Orthodox have the pleasure of receiving a Catholic delegation, as indeed we are received today by all of you on the occasion of the Feast of Saint Peter—the chief among the apostles.

This exchange of visits goes beyond ecclesiastical formality: there are real, visible tokens that affirm in the most unambiguous way our desire and commitment to be united again in perfect communion. They are signs that profess in the clearest way our respect for each other's traditions; they remind us of everything that we held in common during the first millennium and we continue to hold in common; and they encourage us to overcome the differences that so sadly separate us. Differences that should and must be overcome, Your Excellency, so that the Church's *witness* may remain strong and beyond any reproach, such that our divisions might invite from those who haven't yet embrace Peter's confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:16).

It is thus that Peter becomes the unshakable rock over which our Lord's Church is built—the rock over which the futile waves of relativism, secularism, heresy and atheism break. Throughout its history, the Orthodox Church has kept Peter's confession during adverse times and in the face of fierce adversaries. I pray that our Lord will bring it to pass that we embrace not only the confession but also the *confessor*, namely, St Peter's successor.

Our common tradition is unapologetically incarnational and that means that everything in our theology is centered on a person. The truth we believe in is not a fleshless theory but a Person, the Word who became flesh. It was Him who revealed to us a personal God Who exists as a communion of Persons. Finally that faith was entrusted to persons, the Holy Apostles and their successors, the bishops. Our allegiance, therefore, and our loyalty, our obedience cannot be to an abstract idea—even if that is as solid as St Peter's confession—but must be to a person. It is the bishop's person who unites and reveals the Church on the local level, whether it is in Boston, in Rome or in Athens. But, ultimately, these local Churches, dispersed throughout the whole world, would remain separated from each other by their particularity unless the many become one on a higher level. There too, it must be the person of a bishop, not merely a confession but a confessor, that unites and reveals the universal Church. And it was this very ministry that was entrusted to the first among the apostles, the brother of St Andrew, St Peter.

Sancti Apostoli Petre et Paule orate pro unitate Ecclesiae nostrae. Amen.