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CNS documentary service

Homily at Mass Opening Orthodox Holy and Great Council

Patriarch Bartholomew

As the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church opened with only 10 of the 14 Orthodox churches represented, the spiritual head of the Orthodox insisted the Orthodox Church is united in its faith in Christ and in church doctrine. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople is presiding over the council that is thought to be the first of its kind in over 1,000 years. In his June 19 homily at the Cathedral of St. Minas in Heraklion, Crete, Patriarch Bartholomew said, "The Orthodox Church is one but reveals itself in the world through its individual local vines, which are

"The unity of the Orthodox Church and its faithful represents our mission."

unbreakably and indivisibly attached to one — to one church, to one body." The patriarch did not directly address the absence of delegations from the Orthodox churches of Bulgaria, Antioch, Georgia and Russia, which is the largest of the Orthodox churches. Although they had agreed in January to attend, the absent churches cited a variety of reasons for staying away, ranging from jurisdictional disputes to objections to the procedures adopted for the meeting. The patriarchs of the 10 participating churches had met separately June 17 and sent last-minute pleas to the four churches to attend. "Regardless of our different opinions, we Orthodox Christians ought to point out that the only road on our course in this world is unity," the patriarch said in his homily for the Mass of Pentecost on the Orthodox calendar. The patriarch spoke in Greek; the council's official translation of his homily follows.

a joyful day has now dawned in which we celebrate the historic manifestation of the institution of the church, which is constituted by the Holy Spirit, and we Orthodox brothers, who represent all the local Orthodox autocephalous churches, have gathered together in a liturgical assembly so that we may carry out the duty and responsibility of the one Orthodox Church to the people and to the world today by convening our Holy and Great Council.

Today is a day of unity, as we are all united in the faith and the sacraments through

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