

CARDINAL MONTEZEMOLO ASSESSES THE PAULINE YEAR

VATICAN CITY, 26 JUN 2009 (VIS) -

In the Holy See Press Office this morning Cardinal Andrea Cordero Lanza di Montezemolo, archpriest of the papal basilica of St. Paul's Outside-the-Walls in Rome, and Pier Carlo Visconti, delegate for the administration of the same basilica, held a briefing on the closure of the Pauline Year.

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The Theme of Paul

The cardinal recalled how the Year came into being as a "thematic year" with two fundamental objectives: "To increase people's knowledge of, and invite them to meditate upon, the valuable message left to us by the Apostle of the Gentiles in his writings, which are often difficult and little known or poorly interpreted", and "to create various programmes in the ecumenical dimension, which means working to an ever greater degree with non-Catholic Christian communities on various initiatives of prayer, study and culture".

Thousands of pilgrims

During the course of the Pauline Year, inaugurated by the Pope on 28 June 2008, the basilica welcomed tens of thousands of pilgrims. "On 1 May 2009 alone more than eighteen thousand pilgrims came to the basilica", explained the cardinal, "and over recent weeks we have certainly seen more than ten thousand a day".

Opening of Synod on the Word of God

Among the ecclesial events of the Pauline Year, the cardinal mentioned "the opening of the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God, which the Pope wished should be inaugurated in the basilica of St. Paul in October 2008, ... the 'Sinaxis' celebrated by all the patriarchs of the Orthodox Churches in Constantinople, followed by a congress focusing on specifically Pauline issues", and "visits to Rome by patriarchs accompanied by large delegations from the Oriental Churches, both Catholic and non-Catholic".

Fresh Stimulus to Evangelisation

"In the Church of Rome, but also and above all in the various local Churches, ... the celebration of the second millennium of the birth of the Apostle of the Gentiles was perceived and experienced as a fresh stimulus, a further reason to work towards evangelisation. This was also felt in the Orthodox Churches and in many other Christian communities, and has become a shared commitment on the path to recreating unity among Christians".

Sarcophagus of Paul

As for the papal basilica itself, during the Pauline Year "an opening was made in the ancient fifth century brickwork surrounding Paul's tomb under the main altar, so that pilgrims could see one side of the great marble sarcophagus, which has never been opened and which has held the mortal remains of the Apostle for the last twenty centuries". The basilica was also used for concerts of religious music and for other cultural initiatives.

The Pauline Door and Flame

"The Pauline Year is coming to an end", said Cardinal Montezemolo, "but the great ferment of pastoral initiatives, catechesis, and cultural events is destined to continue and to find a large following at both the local and the continental level. The Pauline Door ... will remain open, and the Pauline flame lit by the Holy Father at the beginning of this year will continue to burn in the quadriporticus, ... reminding all the pilgrims who continue to arrive from every corner of the globe of the richness and profundity of the Word of God transmitted to us by the Apostle of the Gentiles".

Seven pontifical delegations

Finally the archpriest of the papal basilica of St. Paul's Outside-the-Walls announced that "over this very period, to mark the closure of the Pauline Year, the Holy Father is sending seven pontifical delegations, each led by a cardinal, to seven places associated with the

Apostle Paul: the Holy Land, Damascus, Tarsus, Cyprus, Athens, Malta and Lebanon".