

In Cyprus, Pope Francis urges better relations between Catholic, Orthodox churches

Dec. 3 (UPI) — During a mass Friday on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, Pope Francis urged reconciliation between the Catholic and Orthodox churches and separately met with the leader of Cyprus' Greek Orthodox Church.

The pontiff met with Archbishop Chrysostomos II at his home and at the Holy Synod, the Greek Orthodox Church's top decision-making body in Nicosia.

During mass, Francis told a congregation of 7,000 people at the GSP Stadium that both churches had a common apostolic origin in St. Paul, who traveled to Cyprus and to Rome.

Using the parable of two blind men, he said that people would remain divided if they didn't heal from their "blindness."

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"Often we would rather remain closed in on ourselves, alone in the darkness, feeling sorry for ourselves and content to have sadness as our companion," Francis said. "So let us ask ourselves: Do I remain wrapped in the darkness of despondency and joylessness, or do I go to Jesus and give my life to him?"

Some congregants came from Lebanon while others waved the flags of Cyprus and the Vatican. The choir sang hymns in Greek, English and Italian.

Those unable to enter watched the mass on large televisions outside the stadium.

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Francis' "apostolic journey to Cyprus" includes meetings with refugees, clergy, religious leaders, civil authorities and the diplomatic corps.

The pope arrived on the island Thursday and is scheduled to visit Greece before returning to Rome on Monday.

When he arrived, he was greeted by Speaker of Cyprus' House of Parliament Annita Demetriou on the tarmac and driven to the Our Lady of Graces Cathedral to see the Maronite Catholic Archdiocese of Cyprus.

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Francis' visit is the second time a pope has visited Cyprus, following Pope Benedict XVI's trip in 2010.

Roughly 850,000 people in Cyprus are Christians and Catholics make up about 38,000, or 4.5%, of the entire population. The majority are Greek Orthodox and 2% are Muslims.

Source:

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