

Pope to Visit Turkey This Month

ROME, Nov. 18 (UPI) — Pope John Paul II announced today that he would visit Turkey at the end of this month to seek further progress toward reuniting the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

The two churches split in the Great Schism of 1054 in a dispute over doctrine, ritual and the infallibility of the pope.

At his regular Sunday noon blessing, the Pope told about 40,000 people beneath his apartment window overlooking St. Peter's Square that he wanted them "to be the first to hear the good news" of his trip, which is scheduled for Nov. 28-30.

He said he would go to Ankara, the Turkish capital, and to Istanbul, where he will meet the Ecumenical Patriarch, Dimitrios I. He will also visit Ephesus in western Turkey, where Jesus' mother Mary is said to have lived.

"This visit is important," the Pope said. "It shows concretely the Pope's determination, asserted many times already, to promote the effort for unity of all Christians."

On Eve of 'Theological Dialogue'

The Pontiff said, "We are on the eve of beginning a theological dialogue with the venerable Orthodox churches to overcome the differences that still exist."

Those differences center mainly on the Roman Catholic claim to papal primacy and the Roman Catholic teaching that the eucharist, the wine and bread consecrated at mass, is the real blood and body of Christ.

The Eastern Orthodox Church has

about 70 million members compared to the Roman Catholic Church's approximately 550 million.

Pope Paul VI's visit to Istanbul and Ephesus in 1967 was the most recent visit by a pope to Turkey and the first in 12 centuries. He gave a kiss of peace to Dimitrios's predecessor, Athenagoras, on Jerusalem's Mount of Olives in 1964, saw Athenagoras in Istanbul again in 1967, and Athenagoras came to Rome in 1970.

It will be John Paul's first visit to a predominantly non-Christian nation since his election 13 months ago. Turkey's population is more than 85 percent Moslem. The Pope has visited Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Poland, Ireland and the United States.

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