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In first since Great Schism, Orthodox to attend papal Mass

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NCR Today
Pope Francis

For the first time since the Schism between Western and Eastern Christianity in the year 1054, the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople will attend a papal inauguration Mass, AsiaNews reported Friday.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I will attend Pope Francis' formal inauguration in St. Peter's Square Tuesday, along with representatives of Argentina's Orthodox Church and Italy's Orthodox Church, the news service reports.

Bartholomew's attending of the papal inauguration might be seen in some circles as a sign of hope for reunification between the churches, although of course it has been a millennia since the five episcopal sees of the Roman Empire -- Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem -- were completely undivided.

Among issues long discussed in ecumenical dialog between Orthodox and Catholic leaders has been what primacy the pope holds over other Christian leaders.

Those looking for unity might take heart in Pope Francis' first words to St. Peter's Square upon his election Wednesday, where he did not once refer to himself as pope, but rather simply Rome's bishop.

"And now, we take up this journey," Francis said then. "This journey of the church of Rome which presides in charity over all the churches."

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