
PRAYER FOR CHURCH UNITY



The Week of prayer for Christian Unity will take place from January 21 to January 28, throughout the world. I urge every in the Diocese to make this a priority, in your prayer intentions. This was Christ's supreme desire: *«That all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me... and that you loved them as you loved me.»* [John 17, 21, 23b]

URGENCY OF UNITY

This short excerpt from the prayer of Jesus indicates the earnestness of his demand. It is an inescapable dimension of our faith. The Church has become more and more aware of this, especially since the time of the extraordinary Vatican Council II: Blessed John XXIII had made this the Council's main objective. It was on January 25, 1959 that in the Basilica of St. Paul-outside-the-Walls he announced his intention of convening an ecumenical council for the spread of Christian unity. The Decree on Ecumenism was published November 21, 1964, recalling that the restoration of unity among Christians constituted one of the major goals of Vatican Council II: *«Division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the sacred cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature.»* [Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1]

ACHIEVEMENTS

Despite unfortunate incidents, several beautiful gestures of ecumenical significance have been made, these past few years. We have only to think of the many meetings the Holy Father had on his many apostolic trips: every one of these visits always includes such meetings. We recall his words at the ecumenical meeting held in Toronto, September 14, 1984: *«We rejoice to see the important progress made, because many obstacles, misunderstandings, and suspicions have been dispelled. Let us thank God for this. Experience has confirmed even more, in my heart, the Gospel obligation to loyally pursue with perseverance, humility and courage reconciliation and unity.»* Whether with the Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans or any of the other Christian Churches, the Pope's intention was to show true respect and understanding.

A PAGE OF HISTORY

It is unheard-of in the annals of the papacy, and significant that in his encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint* on ecumenical commitment published May 25, 1995, Pope John Paul, asks his readers to help him better define and carry out his ministry as St. Peter's successor: *«When I say that, for me, as Bishop of Rome, the ecumenical task is one of the pastoral priorities of my Pontificate, I think of the grave obstacle which the lack of unity represents for the proclamation of the Gospel. A Christian community which believes in Christ and desires, with Gospel fervour, the salvation of humankind can hardly be closed to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who leads all Christians toward full and visible unity. Here an imperative of charity is in question, an imperative which admits of no exception.»* [*Ut Unum Sint*, 99] And talking of his ministry of successor of Peter, he writes: *«this is an immense task, which we cannot refuse and which I cannot carry out by myself. Could not the real but imperfect communion existing between us persuade Church leaders and their theologians to engage with me in a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject, a dialogue in which, leaving useless controversies behind, we could listen to one another, keeping before us only the will of Christ for his*

Church and allowing ourselves to be deeply moved by his plea "that they may all be one... so that the world may believe that you have sent me" ? (Jn. 17:21) » [Ut Unum Sint, 96]

GOSPEL OF RECONCILIATION

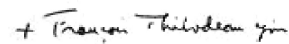
«How indeed can we proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation without at the same time being committed to working for reconciliation between Christians? However true it is that the Church, by the prompting of the Holy Spirit and with the promise of indefectibility, has preached and still preaches the Gospel to all nations, it is also true that she must face the difficulties which derive from the lack of unity. When non-believers meet missionaries who do not agree among themselves, even though they all appeal to Christ, will they be in a position to receive the true message? Will they not think that the Gospel is a cause of division, despite the fact that it is presented as the fundamental law of love? This is an immense challenge today.» [Ut Unum Sint, 98]

GRASS-ROOTS ECUMENISM

I rejoice that in our Diocese contacts between Christians of different denominations are characterized by simplicity, mutual esteem and kindness. I am particularly happy at what is lived in the parishes of the Southern Victoria Deanery: ministerial associations, Community Chaplaincy, and work for the unprotected and the destitute, notably the food banks. There is prayer in common in truth and charity. The Way of Solidarity which winds through Edmundston and Grand Falls on Good Friday often involves our brothers and sisters of other Christian Churches. The diocesan retreat for the English-speaking to be held at the Diocesan Centre February 9, 10 and 11, and facilitated by Judge Graydon Nicholas and his wife will be an ecumenical endeavour.

ANOTHER LONG ROAD

Reflecting on the Holy Year 2000 regarding ecumenism, Pope John Paul II wrote: [*Novo Millennio Invenire*] *«The Jubilee has offered some truly moving and prophetic signs, but there is still a long way to go. By fixing our gaze on Christ, the Great Jubilee has given us a more vivid sense of the Church as a mystery of unity.»* May all who are united around the Word make of this 2001 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity a special strong time of love and understanding, of reconciliation and forgiveness, of communion and cooperation. Have a good week!



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« From A Bishop's Journal » (367) (24 January 2001)