



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO BANGLADESH, SINGAPORE, FIJI ISLANDS,
NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA AND SEYCHELLES

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Christchurch (New Zealand), 24 November 1986

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen".

Dear Brothers and Sisters, dear Friends,

1. My thanks to you for coming to take part in this act of prayer; how fitting that it should be my first encounter with the Christian people in Christchurch. With great pleasure I join with leaders of the Catholic Church and other Christian Communion in New Zealand, with the Mayor and Mayoress of Christchurch, with representatives from Samoa, and especially with the Maori people, who have already welcomed me here so warmly. With Bishop Hanrahan and with Bishop Ashby, who have done so much for good relations among Christians, I rejoice at this occasion which speaks so vividly of the desire of New Zealand Christians, especially of you who are present here today, for that unity which our Lord wills for his followers.

2. New Zealand has always been a place of new beginnings. Your ancestors came here to make a better life in a land of opportunity. You yourselves have faced problems with vigour and have tried to find solutions. In this spirit you have faced the divisions among Christians. You have entered into dialogue, collaborated in projects for justice, peace and human well-being, and you have sought to devise suitable means to enable the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities to work and pray together for full unity.

Jesus Christ came to "gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad". This is the design of God - that the human family should be one. It was Christ's work on the Cross to bring together the broken fragments of humanity. The Church was founded by Christ as an instrument

for this purpose. It is precisely in the Church that, through the Holy Spirit, the recomposition of broken humanity is to be carried on. The Church herself is the beginning of the incorporation of all peoples into Jesus Christ as one Lord, and she is the sign of God's whole purpose. She is united in herself in order to bring about the unity, peace, and reconciliation which are a foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

3. Such unity can only be the gift of God. It is much more than a federation, a working arrangement, a means of enabling the followers of Jesus Christ to do certain things together. "The promise we have from God is the promise of the unity which is the essence of himself". It is a unity which is nothing less than a sharing in that communion which is the inner life of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a unity in the profession of the apostolic faith. It is a unity in that sacramental life whereby Jesus Christ touches human lives with his salvation and maintains the communion of believers in one visible body. It is also a unity with the visible teaching authority of the Church, which in God's design necessarily expresses her inner communion. Only a deeply interior yet fully visible unity such as this could be adequate for Christ's mission to knit together the connective tissue of humanity torn apart by sin.

4. As we meet here today we can rejoice that despite the still serious divisions between us, a real communion, limited though it is, does bind us together. We can call one another brothers and sisters, for we call on Jesus Christ as our one Lord, are baptized in his name, and already share many of his saving gifts.

Yet in honesty we also have to acknowledge that real differences between us make our communion incomplete. It is a communion that still falls short of "that unity which Jesus Christ wanted to bestow on all those to whom he has given new birth in one body". This is the measure of our ecumenical task. It is this which calls forth our persevering efforts of theological dialogue. Since the unity which Christ will for his Church is a unity in faith, we cannot settle for less. We must work for it by the process of honest dialogue sustained by prayer, without compromising the truth; by facing up to the demands of the teachings of Jesus Christ; and by refusing to settle for a minimal form of Christianity, always seeking to do the truth in love.

5. Here in New Zealand you have experienced the strength of the commitment which the Catholic Church brings to the ecumenical movement, a commitment which I assure you is irreversible. At the same time I am aware that the Catholic participation makes new demands of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities taking part in the ecumenical movement. For we come to it with those Catholic principles of ecumenism formulated in the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism. We are convinced that the goal is not simply partnership; it is nothing less than the fullness of communion in a visible, organic unity. The ecumenical way cannot be one of reduction. It is rather a journey of growth into the fullness of Christ, the fullness of unity. It is a journey in which the Churches and Ecclesial Communities taking part must have a genuine respect for one another and for their gifts and traditions, helping each other towards that unity in faith which alone

can enable us to be one Church and to share in one Eucharist.

This is the goal of our dialogue and theological reflection, our common study of the Scripture, our collaboration in upholding justice and peace and serving human needs, our common witness, and our prayer together.

It is a goal which cannot be reached without fervent prayer, penance, and conversion of heart. For in the end it is not we who will bring about the unity of all Christians; we can only prepare ourselves to cooperate with what God is doing in order to bring it about.

Because so much has been done here in New Zealand to bring Christians together, and because there is such a strong desire for closer communion, I have taken the occasion of our prayer, and the dedication of the Chapel of Unity in this Cathedral, to speak to you about some central issues of the ecumenical task. Be strong and faithful in giving your best energies to it. knowing that he who has begun this good work can "bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ". Amen.

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