



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO ZIMBABWE, BOTSWANA, LESOTHO,
SWAZILAND AND MOZAMBIQUE

ECUMENICAL MEETING

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Catholic Community Center, Maseru (Lesotho)

Thursday, 15 September 1988

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2Cor. 1, 2).

It is a joy for me to have this opportunity to meet the representatives of *other Ecclesial Communities* in Lesotho. As you know, a very special reason why I wanted to come to your country was to celebrate here the beatification of Blessed Joseph Gérard, one of the first Catholic missionaries to the Basotho people. But, at the same time, I felt it was important that this pastoral visit have *an ecumenical dimension*. For, even before the first Catholic missionaries arrived in Lesotho, other Christians had already begun here the work of evangelization. And throughout the years, right up to the present moment, you and your Catholic brothers and sisters have sought to serve the Lord in this land. At the same time, however, you have experienced here, as elsewhere in the world, the sad phenomenon of disunity among Christians. Yet, you have also experienced an ever greater desire for overcoming the obstacles and divisions of the past and of reaching, in the future, that complete unity for which Christ himself prayed.

I trust that this prayer service today will give *encouragement* to all those who are committed to the ecumenical movement and I pray that it will *hasten the day* when we shall be fully one in Christ, with a oneness like that which Jesus asked of his Father when he said: "May they be so completely one that the world will realize that it was you who sent me and that *I have loved them as much as you loved me*" (Jo. 17, 23).

2. In the First Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, the great Apostle to the Gentiles tells the people, “it is clear that there are *serious differences among you*” (1Cor. 1, 11). Factions had grown up within that local Church, factions which threatened the faith and communion of the members. Saint Paul wished to do all he could to see that these were overcome. And so he wrote: “I do appeal to you, brothers, *for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, to make up the differences between you*, and instead of disagreeing among yourselves, *to be united again in your belief and practice*” (*Ibid.* 1, 10).

What Saint Paul desired for the Christians at Corinth was that they should overcome their divisions and seek the *grace of sincere conversion*. For, without this personal change of heart, conflicts and disagreements could never be overcome, unity in belief and practice could never be restored.

At the Second Vatican Council, the bishops of the Catholic Church spoke of the same need for conversion in order to make ecumenical progress. They taught: “There can be *no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart*. For it is from newness of attitudes, from self-denial and unstilted love, that yearnings for unity take their rise and grow towards maturity” (Cfr. *Eph.* 4, 23).

For us, then, the ecumenical effort *begins in humble prayer*, asking our God, who is rich in mercy, to forgive our sins, enlighten our minds and give us the grace of a change of heart.

3. Such a conversion means *turning away* from sin and *turning towards* the truth, *the fullness of truth that Christ reveals*. With the words of the Psalm, we say to God: “Indeed *you love truth in the heart*; then in the secret of my heart *teach me wisdom*” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 7). This personal search for truth, begun in prayer and aided by study, makes possible one of the important activities of the ecumenical movement, namely, the practice of dialogue.

Dialogue aims at bringing about that communion of mind and heart which is modelled on the inner life of the Blessed Trinity. The first steps, which are often painstakingly slow, require patience and perseverance. Misunderstandings from the past must be overcome and a better understanding of each other must be fostered. We must learn to speak to one another in honesty and in fraternal charity, with a desire to pursue and embrace the fullness of God’s truth. In this endeavour, clarity is an expression of charity, which the Second Vatican Council wisely suggested, saying: “It is...essential that doctrine be clearly presented in its entirety. Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false conciliatory approach...”.

We must proceed, then, with the art of dialogue, remaining faithful to what the Spirit of God has already done in our lives and in our communities, and confident that, if we ask God in faith, “in the secret of our hearts he will teach us wisdom”.

4. Within the Christian Council of Lesotho, you seek to create a forum for pursuing this ecumenical

dialogue and also for promoting fraternal cooperation in projects which serve the common good. Such collaboration manifests the real, although imperfect, unity in Christ which we already share. And it can increase our effectiveness in serving the poor and needy after the example of Jesus our Lord, who tells us “in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me”.

Of particular value are those instances when Christians of diverse traditions stand together in the name of Christ to defend and promote the dignity and rights of the human person, regardless of race or tribe or social status. Such common action on behalf of justice and equality bears witness to the Gospel and serves the human family as a whole.

So many other areas of mutual cooperation remain open to us, such as direct assistance to the sick and suffering, support for family life, and efforts to promote reconciliation and peace. In a developing country such as Lesotho, certainly the work of fostering integral human development is a fertile field for working together as brothers and sisters in our one Lord and Saviour.

5. Dear friends in Christ: let us keep before our eyes at all times the Cross of our Lord and Redeemer, for in the Crucified Saviour those who “used to be so far apart from us have been brought very close, by the blood of Christ”.

To be sure, the path to full unity in faith and charity is long and difficult. We cannot expect to reach the end without much prayer and penance. By the grace of God, however, we have already come a long way. Real progress has been made.

In God’s good time, Christ’s prayer for perfect unity will be fully answered. Christ has already conquered the power of sin which is the cause of all division. We must not grow weary or give up the struggle until the goal we so desire has been achieved. In particular, let us never cease to pray with joyful hope, opening our hearts in trust to receive the manifold gifts of the Spirit.

What the Spirit brings to us are all the gifts that shall accompany full communion in Christ, the gifts of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control”.

And as Saint Paul assures us, “There can be no law against things like that... Since the Spirit of our life, let us be directed by the Spirit”.

Yes, let us follow the Spirit’s lead, the Holy Spirit who has been given to us in Baptism, the “Advocate” who always pleads our cause, the “Spirit of truth whom the world can never receive”, the Spirit whom Jesus sends to lead us “to complete truth”.

My friends in Christ, I bid you farewell using the words of Saint Paul: “In the meantime, brothers, we wish you happiness; try to grow perfect; help one another. Be united; live in peace, and the

God of love and peace will be with you”.

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