



The Holy See

ECUMENICAL RITE DURING THE XIII GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Thursday, 5 December 1985

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. There is one centre around which the human family can be united Jesus Christ. That is the will and plan of God. Jesus said: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (*Jo.* 12, 32). He died "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (*Ibid.* 11, 52). His Church is "the sacrament or instrument and sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (*Lumen Gentium*, 1). She is truly the beginning of the incorporation of all humanity into Jesus Christ as the one Lord. "In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his Cross" (*Col.* 1, 19-20).

Divisions among Christians are contrary to the plan of God. "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (*1 Tim.* 2, 5), in whom God wishes to reconcile all things to himself. Those who are the bearers of his mission must themselves be reconciled; they must show forth his unifying love in action; they must live in that communion which is towards the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, and they must manifest this in a united community which witnesses to the reconciling work of God.

The Second Vatican Council threw new light on this imperative and the present Synod has reaffirmed it. So it was important that in these days, in company with our friends the delegated Observers from the other Churches and Christian World Communions, we should spend some time in prayer for the unity of Christians.

2. The restoration of unity must be above all a restoration of the inner dimension of the Christian life - a wholehearted personal commitment to Jesus Christ which makes intolerable any separation among those who share that commitment. Any faltering in the movement towards unity since the impetus of the Second Vatican Council is partly due to the fact that we have not attended enough to this interior dimension. We must not take it for granted. The most basic form of work for the unity of Christians is sustained and persevering prayer, which itself calls forth collaboration and dialogue. It is because individuals and communities in the Catholic Church gave themselves to such prayer that the Church was able in the Second Vatican Council to assume with special vigour her ecumenical responsibility. A change of heart, interior conversion, renewal of the Church - which were among the central objectives of the Council (Cfr. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 6-7) - are essential to the ecumenical movement and its growth.

3. As we gather here this afternoon, let us ask the Lord who ended all enmities by his Cross and who broke down all walls of separation to look with compassion on the agonies of our world. By the power of his Holy Spirit, may he make us instruments of his peace and reconciliation. Let us pray that God will touch the Catholic Church with the power of his renewing grace on the occasion of the Synod, and that he may equally renew and encourage in the search for unity those Churches and Christian World Communions represented here by their Observers, and all other Christian communities. Let us thank him for what he has done for them as well as for the Catholic Church through the Second Vatican Council. Together we ask that for all of us this Synod may be a point of revival of the will for unity, a deepening of our purpose to go ahead, a resolution to continue in theological dialogue, in greater efforts of collaboration and common witness and in unflinching prayer.

May he who has begun this good work in us "bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (*Phil.* 1, 6).