



The Holy See

DIVINE LITURGY IN BYZANTINE (GREEK CATHOLIC) RITE

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

Monday, 25 June 2001

Kyiv, Chayka Airport

1. *"As you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so may they be in us, that the world may believe that you have sent me"* (cf. *Jn 17:21*).

The passage from the Gospel of Saint John just proclaimed takes us back in mind and heart to the Upper Room, the place of the Last Supper, where Jesus, before his Passion, prays to the Father for his Apostles. He has just entrusted to them the Holy Eucharist and made them ministers of the New Covenant, with the task now of continuing his mission for the salvation of the world.

In the Saviour's words there appears the consuming desire to rescue humanity from the spirit and mind-set of the world. At the same time there emerges his conviction that salvation passes through that "being one" which, patterned after the life of the Trinity, must characterize the daily experience and decisions of all his disciples.

2. *"Ut unum sint — That they may all be one!"* (*Jn 17:21*). The Upper Room is the place of unity that is born of love. It is the place of mission: *"so that the world may believe!"* (*ibid.*). There is no authentic evangelization without full fraternal communion.

For this reason, in the evening of the first day after the Sabbath, showing himself in the Upper Room to his disciples, the Risen Lord reconfirms the close connection between mission and communion as he tells them: *"As the Father has sent me, even so I send you"* (*Jn 20:21*), and he adds: *"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained"* (*Jn 20:22-23*).

And it is also in the Upper Room, on the day of Pentecost, that the disciples together with Mary, Jesus' Mother, receive the Holy Spirit, who was manifested in this way: *"A sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one*

of them" (Acts 2:2-3). From the gift of the Risen Christ is born the new humanity, the Church, in which communion overcomes the divisions and dispersion generated by the spirit of the world and symbolized in the biblical account of the Tower of Babel: "*each one heard them speaking in his own language*" (Acts 2:6). Having been made one by the power of the Paraclete, the disciples become instruments of dialogue and peace, and they set in motion the mission of evangelizing the nations.

3. "*That they may all be one*". This is the mystery of the Church willed by Christ. Unity founded on revealed Truth and on Love does not nullify man, his culture or his history; rather it makes him part of the communion of the Trinity, in which everything authentically human is enriched and strengthened.

This is a mystery that is well represented also in this Liturgy, concelebrated by Catholic Bishops and priests of the Eastern and Latin traditions. In the new humanity, born from the Father's heart, and having Christ as its head, and living through the gift of the Spirit, there is a plurality of traditions, rites, canonical disciplines which, far from undermining the unity of the Body of Christ, on the contrary enrich it with the gifts brought by each one. In this, the miracle of Pentecost is continuously repeated: people of different languages, traditions, and cultures feel united in the profession of the one faith within the one communion that is born from on high.

With these sentiments, I greet all here present. I greet especially Cardinal Lubomyr Husar, Major Archbishop of Lviv of the Ukrainians, and Archbishop Marian Jaworski, Metropolitan of Lviv of the Latins, and the Bishops of the respective rites, the priests and the faithful. I greet every representative of the Ecclesial Community which shows forth its array of riches in a unique way in this Land, where the traditions of East and West meet. Your living side by side in charity should become a model of a unity that exists within a legitimate pluralism and has its guarantee in the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter.

4. Since the beginning, in effect, your Church has benefited from different cultural relationships and from a Christian witness coming from various sources. According to tradition, at the dawn of Christianity it was the Apostle Andrew himself who, visiting the places where we are gathered today, spoke of the holiness found here. In fact, it is told that, as he contemplated the cliffs of the Dnieper, he blessed the land of Kyiv and said: "On these mountains will shine the glory of God". Thus he foretold the conversion to the Christian faith of the Great Prince of Kyiv, the holy baptizer Volodymyr, thanks to whom the Dnieper became as it were the "Jordan of the Ukraine", and the capital Kyiv a "new Jerusalem", the mother of Slav Christianity in Eastern Europe.

What testimonies to holiness have followed one upon another in your Land since the day of its Baptism! Standing out at the beginning are the martyrs of Kyiv, Prince Boris and Prince Hlib, whom you call "bearers of passion", who accepted martyrdom at the hand of their brother without taking arms against him. It is they who formed the spiritual features of the Church of Kyiv, where martyrdom in the name of brotherly love, in the name of Christian unity, showed itself to be a truly universal charism. The history of the recent past has also amply confirmed this.

5. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call" (Eph 4:4). Are not the stories of the martyrs of your Church a fulfilment of the words of the Apostle Paul just proclaimed in the reading of the Epistle? He said to the Christians of Ephesus: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the

calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (*Eph 4:1-3*).

Your re-won independence has opened a new and promising period which commits your country's citizens, as Metropolitan Andrii Sheptytskyi liked to recall, to the goal of "rebuilding their own home", Ukraine. For ten years your Country has been a free and independent State. These ten years have shown that, despite the temptations linked to crime and corruption, its spiritual roots are strong. My heartfelt hope is that Ukraine will continue to draw strength from the ideals of personal, social and ecclesial morality, of service of the common good, of honesty and sacrifice, not forgetting the gift of the Ten Commandments. The dynamic quality of your country's faith and its Church's capacity for rebirth are surprising: the roots of its past have become a pledge of hope for the future.

Dear Brothers and Sisters! The Lord's power which has sustained your Country is a gentle power, a power which relies on human support. It works through your fidelity and your generosity in responding to Christ's call.

At this particular moment, I wish to pay homage to those who have gone before you in the faith and who, despite the great trials endured, have preserved the Sacred Tradition. May their shining example encourage you to have no fear. Filled with the Spirit of Christ, be eager to build your future according to his plan of love.

6. As we recall your Land's centuries-old fidelity to the Gospel, we are brought back today as if by instinct to the Upper Room and to the words spoken by Christ on the eve of his Passion.

The Church constantly returns to the Upper Room, where she was born and where her mission began. The Church needs to return there, where the Apostles, after the Lord's Resurrection, were filled with the Holy Spirit, receiving the gift of tongues in order to proclaim in the midst of the peoples and nations of the world the great things done by God (cf. *Acts 2:11*).

Today we wish to return spiritually to the Upper Room in order to understand better the reasons for the unity and mission which have guided this far, on the banks of the Dnieper, the steps of the brave heralds of the Gospel, so that among the multitude of languages there would not be missing that of the inhabitants of Rus'.

"*Ut unum sint!*". We wish to join in the prayer of the Lord for the unity of his disciples. It is a heartfelt appeal for the unity of Christians. It is an unceasing prayer, which rises from hearts that are humble and ready to feel, think and work generously so that Christ's desire may be fulfilled. From this Land, sanctified by the blood of whole hosts of martyrs, I raise with you my prayer to the Lord that all Christians may once again be "one", according to the desire of Jesus in the Upper Room. May the Christians of the third millennium present themselves before the world with one heart and one soul!

I entrust this ardent yearning to Jesus' Mother, who from the beginning has been praying with the Church and for the Church. May she, as in the Upper Room, sustain us through her intercession. May she guide us on the path of reconciliation and unity, so that in every part of the earth Christians will finally be able to proclaim together Christ and his message of salvation to the men and women of the new millennium.

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