



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 22 January 2014

Video

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Last Saturday the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* began and will conclude this coming Saturday, the Feast of the Conversion of the Apostle St Paul. This invaluable spiritual initiative has brought Christian communities together for more than a century. It is a time dedicated to prayer for the unity of all the baptized, according to the will of Christ: “that they may all be one” (Jn 17:21). Every year, an ecumenical group from a region of the world, under the guidance of the World Council of Churches and the [Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity](#), suggests the theme and prepares reflections for the *Week of Prayer*. This year it was proposed by the Churches and Ecclesial Communions of Canada, and they made reference to the question St Paul posed to the Christians of Corinth: “Has Christ been divided?” (1 Cor 1:13).

Of course, Christ was not divided. But we should recognize with sincerity and pain that our communities continue to live in division that is scandalous. Division among us Christians is a scandal. There is no other word: a scandal. “Each one of you,” St Paul wrote, “says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ’” (1:12).

Even those who professed Christ as their leader were not applauded by Paul, because they used the name of Christ to separate themselves from others within the Christian community. But the name of Christ creates communion and unity, not division! He came to bring communion among us, not to divide us.

Baptism and the Cross are central elements of the Christian discipleship which we share. Division, however, weakens the credibility and effectiveness of our work in evangelization and risks stripping the Cross of its power (cf. 1 Cor 1:17).

Paul rebukes the Corinthians for their disputes, but he also gives thanks to the Lord “because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge” (1 Cor 1:4-5). These words of Paul are not a mere formality, but a sign that he sees primarily — and for this he sincerely rejoices — the gifts given by God to the community. The Apostle’s attitude is an encouragement for us and for every Christian community to joyfully recognize God’s gifts in other communities. Despite the suffering of division, which sadly still exist, let us welcome the words of St Paul as an invitation to sincerely rejoice for the graces God has given to other Christians. We have the same Baptism, the same Holy Spirit who gave us the Grace: let us recognize it and rejoice in it.

It is beautiful to recognize the grace with which God blesses us and, still more, to find in other Christians something we need, something that we could receive like a gift from our brothers and our sisters. The group from Canada who prepared the texts for this Week of Prayer did not invite communities to think about what they could give to their neighbour Christians, but urged them to meet with one another in order to understand what they all can receive each from the others. This requires something more. It requires much prayer, it requires humility, it requires reflection and continual conversion. Let us go forward on this path, praying for the unity of Christians, that this scandal lessens and that it may cease among us.

Greetings:

During this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity I am particularly pleased to greet the students of the ecumenical Graduate School of Bossey. May your studies help to advance ecumenical dialogue and understanding. I also greet the pilgrimage of British Army Chaplains and the delegation from the Jewish Federation of Chicago. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims present at today’s

Audience I cordially invoke God’s blessings of joy and peace!

APPEAL

Today in Montreux, Switzerland, an international conference has opened to promote peace in Syria, which will be followed by negotiations that will be held in Geneva beginning on 24 January. I pray to the Lord that he touch the hearts of all so that, seeking solely the greater good of the Syrian people, so sorely tried, they may spare no effort to bring about without delay a cessation of the violence and an end to the conflict, which has already caused far too much suffering. For the beloved Syrian nation, I wish a decisive path of reconciliation, of harmony and of rebuilding with the participation of all citizens, where each may find in the other not an enemy, not a rival, but a brother to welcome and to embrace.

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