



The Holy See

LITURGY OF THE WORD PRESIDED OVER
BY POPE PAUL VI AND THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

HOMILY OF PAUL VI

Friday, 29 April 1977

Already we have welcomed you, Venerable Brother, and those who have journeyed with you to this ancient and holy place. Today we welcome you all the more cordially, as we meet in prayer, humbled under the mighty hand of God (Cfr. 1 *Petr.* 5, 6), yet full of thanks for all the blessings that this liturgical season reminds us we owe to the divine goodness. As we meet in praise and thanksgiving, with petitions as wide and various as our troubled world, we are able to discern the profound reason for your visit and for our joy in receiving you. For with the Second Vatican Council we are convinced that “there can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without interior conversion” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 7).

If we examine the list of pioneers in the search for unity, we cannot but be reminded of the majestic survey in the eleventh chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews. It is a survey which puts the Holy Scriptures before us as a record of faith. And we are still “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” (*Hebr.* 12, 1), for those who in recent years have laboured in the cause of unity have witnessed no less to faith and hope, and to the perseverance which is their outward manifestation.

Venerable Brother, your presence here is a living expression of this faith and hope, continually being renewed in the Spirit who will guide us “into all the truth” (*Jo.* 16, 13). We wish to join with you in proclaiming this faith and hope, borrowing the words of the Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism: “Before the whole world let Christians confess their faith in God, one and three, in the incarnate Son of God, our Redeemer and Lord. United in their efforts and with mutual respect, let them bear witness to our common hope, which does not play us false” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 12).

We know well how near to your own heart lies this desire for common witness to Christian faith and hope, how much of your pastoral labour in many parts of your Communion has been untiringly devoted to it.

It is the experience of all of us today that the world desperately needs Christ. The young, in whose aspirations good is often seen most vividly, feel this need most strongly. Secular optimism does not satisfy them. They are waiting for a proclamation of hope. Now is our chance to bear witness together that Christ is indeed the way, and the truth and the life, and that he is communicated through the Holy Spirit.

Here is a task to which the Lord calls everyone who invokes his name. Those who are charged with the care of Christians, and who minister to them, feel especially the responsibility of fidelity to the apostolic faith, its embodiment in the life of the Church today, and its transmission to the Church of tomorrow. To discern “the signs of the times” calls for constant refreshment of mind and spirit at the Christian sources, and especially in the Holy Scriptures. In sending all ministers and teachers to the Scriptures, the Vatican Council borrows strong words from Saint Augustine: those ministers and teachers should remain in close contact with the Scriptures by means of reading and accurate study of the text, so as not to become like “one who vainly preaches the word of God externally, while he does not listen to it inwardly”. And from Saint Jerome it takes words even more pointed: “Ignorance of the Scriptures is indeed ignorance of Christ” (Cfr. *Dei Verbum*, 25).

The supplications we make together this morning to our common Lord are steeped in the Christian love of God’s word, and they renew the reality of that pledge made together with us by your revered Predecessor—the pledge to a serious dialogue which, founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions, may lead to that perfect unity in truth, for which Christ prayed. What a challenge, what an uplifting ambition is here! It is good that, while our experts continue their work, we should meet humbly to encounter our Lord in prayer. Indeed we might think of the example of Moses, supported by Aaron and Hur, holding up his arms in supplication for Israel (*Luc. 24, 27*). Today we raise our prayers in support of those who strive for reconciliation and unity in Christ.

To falter in prayer is to falter in hope and to put the cause at risk. We know that a long road remains to be travelled. But does not one of the most moving accounts of the Risen Christ in Saint Luke’s Gospel tell us how, as two of the disciples travelled a road together, Christ joined them and “interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself”? (*Luc. 24, 27*)

Let us listen as we walk, strong in faith and hope, along the road marked out for us.