



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO GREAT BRITAIN

HOLY MASS IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF CHRIST THE KING

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Liverpool

Sunday, 30 May 1982

Praised be Jesus Christ.

1. As Pentecost Sunday draws to its close, we have come to this Church, the Cathedral Church of Christ the King, here in Liverpool, to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, the source and summit of Christian life and the Sacrament of unity and love.

In my apostolic pilgrimage through Britain it is my joy, not only to celebrate the Eucharist, but also to administer other sacraments to the faithful of the local Churches. I have already had the opportunity to baptize and confirm and to confer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

Although it is not possible this evening to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance, nevertheless I wish to emphasize *the importance of penance and reconciliation in the life of the Church* and in the lives of all her individual members.

Two years ago, the National Pastoral Congress gathered in this Cathedral to begin its work with a service of repentance and reconciliation. Those present prayed for healing and mercy, and for the grace to be faithful to God's will. They asked for light and wisdom to guide their deliberations and to deepen their love for the Church. This evening we assemble around this same altar to give honour and glory to the Lord, to praise our God who is rich in mercy. We see the need for conversion and reconciliation. We too pray for understanding where there has been discord. We

seek unity from the same Holy Spirit who grants various gifts to the faithful and different ministries to the Church.

2. Before the first Pentecost, Jesus said to his disciples: "Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained" (*Jo. 20, 23*). These words of our Saviour remind us of *the fundamental gift of our redemption: the gift of having our sins forgiven and of being reconciled with God*. Remission of sin is a completely free and undeserved gift, a newness of life which we could never earn. God grants it to us out of his mercy. As Saint Paul wrote: "It is all God's work. It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation" (*2 Cor. 5, 18*).

There is no sin which cannot be forgiven, if we approach the throne of mercy with humble and contrite hearts. No evil is more powerful than the infinite mercy of God. In becoming man, Jesus entered completely into our human experience, even to the point of suffering the final and most cruel effect of the power of sin - death on a Cross. He really became one like us in all things but sin. But evil with all its power did not win. By dying, Christ destroyed our death; by rising, he restored our life; by his wounds we are healed and our sins are forgiven. For this reason, when the Lord appeared to his disciples after the Resurrection, he showed them his hands and his side. He wanted them to see that the victory had been won; to see that he, the Risen Christ, had *transformed the marks of sin and death into symbols of hope and life*.

3. By the victory of his Cross, Jesus Christ won for us the forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation with God. And it is these gifts that Christ offers us when he gives the Holy Spirit to the Church, for he said to the Apostles: "Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven" (*Jo. 20, 23*). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, *the Church continues Christ's work of reconciling the world to himself*. In every age the Church remains the community of those who have been reconciled with God, the community of those who have received the reconciliation that was willed by God the Father and achieved through the sacrifice of his beloved Son.

The Church is also by her nature always reconciling, handing on to others the gift that she herself has received, the gift of having been forgiven and made one with God. She does this in many ways, but especially through the sacraments, and in particular through Penance. In this consoling sacrament she leads each of the faithful individually to Christ, and through the Church's ministry, Christ himself gives forgiveness, strength and mercy. Through this highly personal sacrament, Christ continues to meet the men and women of our time. He restores wholeness where there was division, he communicates light where darkness reigned, and he gives a hope and joy which the world could never give. Through this sacrament the Church proclaims to the world the infinite riches of God's mercy, that mercy which has broken down barriers which divided us from God and from one another.

On this day of Pentecost, as the Church proclaims the reconciling action of Christ Jesus, and the

power of his Holy Spirit, I appeal to all the faithful of Britain - and to all the other members of the Church who may hear my voice or read my words: Dearly beloved, let us give *greater emphasis to the Sacrament of Penance* in our own lives. Let us strive to safeguard what I described in my first Encyclical as Christ's "right to meet each one of us in that key moment in the soul's life constituted by the moment of conversion and forgiveness" (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Redemptor Hominis*, 20). And in particular I ask you, my brother priests, to realize how closely and how effectively you can collaborate with the Saviour in the divine work of reconciliation. For lack of time, certain worthy activities may have to be abandoned or postponed, but not the confessional. Always give priority to your specifically priestly role in representing the Good Shepherd in the Sacrament of Penance. And as you witness and praise the marvellous action of the Holy Spirit in human hearts, you will feel yourselves called to further conversion and to deeper love of Christ and his flock.

4. As Christians today strive to be sources of reconciliation in the world, they feel the need, perhaps more urgently than ever before, to be fully reconciled among themselves. For *the sin of disunity among Christians*, which has been with us for centuries, *weighs heavily upon the Church*. The seriousness of this sin was clearly shown at the Second Vatican Council, which stated: "Without doubt, this discord openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1).

Restoration of unity among Christians is one of the main concerns of the Church in the last part of the twentieth century. And this task is for all of us. No one can claim exemption from this responsibility. Indeed everyone can make some contribution, however small it may seem, and all are called to that interior conversion which is the essential condition for ecumenism. As the Second Vatican Council taught: "This change of heart and holiness of life, along with the public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and can rightly be called 'spiritual ecumenism'" (*Ibid.* 8).

The Holy Spirit, who is the source of all unity, provides the Body of Christ with a "variety of gifts" (*1 Cor.* 12, 3), so that it may be built up and strengthened. As the Holy Spirit granted the Apostles the gift of tongues, so that all gathered in Jerusalem on that first Pentecost might hear and understand the one Gospel of Christ, should we not expect the same Holy Spirit to grant us the gifts we need in order to continue the work of salvation, and to be reunited as one body in Christ? In this we trust and for this we pray, confident in the power which the Spirit gave to the Church at Pentecost.

5. "Send forth your Spirit . . . and renew the face of the earth" (*Ps.* 104, 30). These words of the psalmist are our heartfelt prayer today, as we ask Almighty God to renew the face of the earth through the life-giving power of the Spirit. Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, renew our hearts and minds with the gifts of light and truth. Renew our homes and families with the gifts of unity and joy. Renew our cities and our countries with true justice and lasting peace. Renew your Church on earth with the gifts of penance and reconciliation, with unity in faith and love.

Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth!

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