



# JOHN PAUL II

## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO GREAT BRITAIN

Eccumenical celebration in Canterbury Cathedral, Homily of John Paul II, Saturday, 29 May 1982

**1. The passages which Archbishop Runcie and I have just read are taken from the Gospel according to John and contain the words of our Lord Jesus Christ on the eve of his Passion. While he was at supper with his disciples, he prayed: “that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (Jo. 17, 21).**

These words are marked in a particular way by the Paschal Mystery of our Saviour, by his Passion, death and Resurrection. Though pronounced once only, they endure throughout all generations. Christ prays unceasingly for the unity of his Church, because he loves her with the same love with which he loved the apostles and disciples who were with him at the Last Supper. “I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word” (Ibid. 17, 20). Christ reveals a divine perspective in which the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are present. Present also is the most profound mystery of the Church: the unity in love which exists between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit penetrates to the heart of the people whom God has chosen to be his own, and is the source of their unity.

Christ’s words resound in a special way today in this hallowed Cathedral which recalls the figure of the great missionary Saint Augustine whom Pope Gregory the Great sent forth so that through his words the sons and daughters of England might believe in Christ.

Dear brethren, all of us have become particularly sensitive to these words of the priestly prayer of Christ. The Church of our time is the Church which participates in a particular way in the prayer of Christ for unity and which seeks the ways of unity, obedient

to the Spirit who speaks in the words of the Lord. We desire to be obedient, especially today, on this historic day which centuries and generations have awaited. We desire to be obedient to him whom Christ calls the Spirit of truth.

2. On the feast of Pentecost last year Catholics and Anglicans joined with Orthodox and Protestants, both in Rome and in Constantinople, in commemorating the First Council of Constantinople by professing their common faith in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life. Once again on this vigil of the great feast of Pentecost, we are gathered in prayer to implore our heavenly Father to pour out anew the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, upon his Church. For it is the Church which, in the words of that Council’s Creed, we profess to be the work par excellence of the Holy Spirit when we say “we believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church”.

Today’s Gospel passages have called attention in particular to two aspects of the gift of the Holy Spirit which Jesus invoked upon his disciples: he is the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of unity. On the first Pentecost day, the Holy Spirit descended on that small band of disciples to confirm them in the truth of God’s salvation of the world through the death and Resurrection of his Son, and to unite them into the one Body of Christ, which is the Church. Thus we know that when we pray “that all may be one” as Jesus and his Father are one, it is precisely in order that “the world may believe” and by this faith be saved (Cfr. Jo. 17, 21). For our faith can be none other than the faith of Pentecost, the faith in which the Apostles were confirmed by the Spirit of truth. We believe that the Risen Lord has authority to save us from sin and the powers of darkness. We believe, too, that we are called to “become one body, one spirit in Christ” (Prex Eucharistica III).

3. In a few moments we shall renew our baptismal vows together. We intend to perform this ritual, which we share in common as Anglicans and Catholics, as a clear testimony to the one sacrament of Baptism by which we have been joined to Christ. At the same time we are humbly mindful that the faith of the Church to which we appeal is not without the marks of our separation. Together we shall renew our renunciation of sin in order to make it clear that we believe that Jesus Christ has overcome the powerful hold of Satan upon “the world” (Io. 14, 17). We shall profess anew our intention to turn away from all that is evil and to turn towards God who is the author of all that is good and the source of all that is holy. As we again make our profession of faith in the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – we find great hope in the promise of Jesus: “The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (Ibid. 14, 26). Christ’s promise gives us confidence in the power of this same Holy Spirit to heal the divisions introduced into the Church in the course of the centuries since that first Pentecost day. In this way the renewal of our baptismal vows will become a pledge to do all in our power to cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit, who alone can lead us to the day when we will profess the fullness of our faith together.

4. We can be confident in addressing our prayer for unity to the Holy Spirit today, for according to Christ’s promise the Spirit, the Counsellor, will be with us for ever (Cfr. ibid. 14, 16). It was with confidence that Archbishop Fisher made bold to visit Pope John XXIII at the time of the Second Vatican Council, and that Archbishops Ramsey and Coggan came to visit Pope Paul VI. It is with no less confidence that I have responded to the promptings of the Holy Spirit to be with you today at Canterbury.

5. My dear brothers and sisters of the Anglican Communion, “whom I love and long for” (Phil. 4, 1), how happy I am to be able to speak directly to you today in this great Cathedral! The building itself is an eloquent witness both to our long years of common inheritance and to the sad years of division that followed. Beneath this roof Saint Thomas Becket suffered martyrdom. Here too we recall Augustine

and Dunstan and Anselm and all those monks who gave such diligent service in this church. The great events of salvation history are retold in the ancient stained glass windows above us. And we have venerated here the manuscript of the Gospels sent from Rome to Canterbury thirteen hundred years ago. Encouraged by the witness of so many who have professed their faith in Jesus Christ through the centuries – often at the cost of their own lives a sacrifice which even today is asked of not a few, as the new chapel we shall visit reminds us – I appeal to you in this holy place, all my fellow Christians, and especially the members of the Church of England and the members of the Anglican Communion throughout the world, to accept the commitment to which Archbishop Runcie and I pledge ourselves anew before you today. This commitment is that of praying and working for reconciliation and ecclesial unity according to the mind and heart of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

6. On this first visit of a Pope to Canterbury, I come to you in love – the love of Peter to whom the Lord said, “I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren” (Luc. 22, 32). I come to you also in the love of Gregory, who sent Saint Augustine to this place to give the Lord’s flock a shepherd’s care (Cfr. 1 Petr. 5, 2). Just as every minister of the Gospel must do, so today I echo the words of the Master: “I am among you as one who serves” (Luc. 22, 27). With me I bring to you, beloved brothers and sisters of the Anglican Communion, the hopes and the desires, the prayers and good will of all who are united with the Church of Rome, which from earliest times was said to “preside in love” (S. IGNATII ANTIOCHENI Ad Romanos, Prooem).

7. In a few moments Archbishop Runcie will join me in reading a Common Declaration, in which we give recognition to the steps we have already taken along the path of unity, and state the plans we propose and the hopes we entertain for the next stage of our common pilgrimage. And yet these hopes and plans will come to nothing if our striving for unity is not rooted in our union with God; for Jesus said, “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who

loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (Io. 14, 20–21). This love of God is poured out upon us in the person of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth and of unity. Let us open ourselves to his powerful love, as we pray that, speaking the truth in love, we may all grow up in every way into him who is the head, into our Lord Jesus Christ (Cfr. Eph. 4, 15). May the dialogue we have begun lead us to the day of full restoration of unity in faith and love.

8. On the eve of his Passion, Jesus told his disciples: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Io. 14, 15). We have felt compelled to come together here today in obedience to the great commandment: the commandment of love. We wish to embrace it in its entirety, to live by it completely, and to experience the power of this commandment in conformity with the words of the Master: “I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you” (Ibid. 14, 16–17).

Love grows by means of truth, and truth draws near to man by means of love. Mindful of this, I lift up to the Lord this prayer: O Christ, may all that is part of today’s encounter be born of the Spirit of truth and be made fruitful through love.

Behold before us: the past and the future!

Behold before us: the desires of so many hearts!

You, who are the Lord of history and the Lord of human hearts, be with us! Christ Jesus, eternal Son of God, be with us! Amen.

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