

Mass for Christian Unity

In a letter Pope John Paul wrote a few years ago he said that men and women today – perhaps unconsciously - ask us not only to speak of Jesus but in some way to “show” him to them. They’re tired of words. There are many preachers in the world. What they want is to “see” Jesus.

I heard of an experience recently that struck me in this regard. It came from a company facing the current difficult financial reality. It’s a company that has always tried to promote a team spirit for many years. Indeed, even some years ago, as an American company, the senior managers all got generous bonuses but what they did was to take the money and then share it among all the staff. The company is now trying its best to see if it can survive at least to the end of the year without letting people go in the hope things might turn. So, they’ve implemented a system of three day a week or four day a week work. One man who was being offered the four day a week saw another man with a family who had been longer in the firm was getting a three day. He offered to give up his for the other. This example seems to be a modern form of “showing” Jesus’ words about laying down your life for your friends.

A hundred years ago the missionaries came back from Asia and they reported what they were being told in Asia: thanks for your preaching about Jesus. But we really can’t believe unless we “see” Christians united, laying down their lives for one another, really interested in one another.

We are celebrating the Week of prayer for Christian unity. Certainly, it reminds us we need to pray, forming what Paul Courturier, one of the major pioneers of the week of prayer spoke of as “the invisible cloister” of people united in prayer worldwide asking for the gift of unity. I know that members of the Legion all over the world also pray for Christian unity in their prayers, especially the Rosary. But this week also reminds us that we are called to give visibility to the body of Christ that we are so that people can see the glory of God as the Gospel tells us.

How? Jesus came not only to save us individually but he also saved relationships. Each one of us can give our contribution to Christian unity by working on improving relationships, the quality of our relationships, the depth and sincerity of Christian love that we bring into our relationships. The reading from the letter to the Ephesians tells us of the qualities of charity that we can live more: patience, generosity, humility, kindness, but above all, charity, the queen of the virtues. Frank Duff wrote on the importance of charity. Mary lived charity in an exemplary way.

All of this holds true for priests and for all of us. In a homily given at an ordination in San Paolo, Cardinal Hummes, now Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, said: “True pastoral ministry is born in a priest’s heart, in his capacity to love each person and every poor person. A new pastoral ministry is born when a priest loves.” Afterwards he met the spiritual director of the seminary there and said to him “as a spiritual

director you should repeat this a thousand times and put it into the hearts of seminarians." Charity in word and deed, thought and judgement in our apostolate, work, and neighbourly friendship.

There are many ways we can live charity with one another and with our brothers and sisters of other churches. While not yet sharing fully in the Eucharist, we're not starting from zero. Catholics say that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life but it would be wrong for us to concentrate everything on the summit. The Eucharist can be seen as summit only if around it there's a field and a plane. And there is much in this field and plane that we yet have to explore and live together among Christians. We had so much in common: the Word of God, the Creed, baptism, spiritual gifts.

In particular this year let's decide to focus on the Word of God. At the Synod of Bishops held last October in Rome dedicated to the theme of the Word of God Cardinal Brady spoke of how much we can admire and learn from Protestant tradition of praying with the Bible at meal. Both he and Archbishop Martin underlined the importance of rediscovering and nourishing ourselves on the Word. Frank Duff had a great love for the Word of God, he nourished himself on it and quoted it.

Frank Duff invited us to have the mind of Mary. The mind of Mary was formed by love of the Word, Scripture. We could say that Mary was clothed with the Word of God. In fact, the Magnificat song that she sung to Elizabeth at the visitation is a litany of texts from the Old Testament. Mary was clearly immersed in the Word of God. She lived it in out day by day in all her thoughts and actions.

One of the great recent developments in the dialogue between Catholics and Anglicans (ARCIC) is the realisation of how much we believe in common about Mary. From John's Gospel we all realise that Mary was given a motherly role in the Church and we are encouraged to embrace her as a spiritual mother. Above all, Mary our mother teaches us the importance of the Word.

By living out the Word of God in our lives, we'll find a new light and strength to build up new relationships, relationships of charity, the great virtue that crowns all others, relationships of unity that wants to reach out to those who are different from us.

We owe it to God and to the world to be one, so the world may "see" Jesus and so believe.

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