



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 24 January 2007

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (2)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Tomorrow, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity comes to a close. This year its theme has been the words in Mark's Gospel: "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak" (cf. Mk 7: 31-37). We too will be able to repeat these words that express the people's admiration at the healing of a deaf-mute worked by Jesus when we see the wondrous flowering of the commitment to restoring Christian unity.

Reviewing the ground we have covered in the past 40 years, it is surprising to see how the Lord has awakened us from the torpor of self-sufficiency and indifference: how he makes us ever more able to "listen to each other" and not just "to hear each other"; how he has loosened our tongues so that the prayers we raise to him may have a greater force of conviction for the world.

Yes, it is true, the Lord has granted us many graces and the light of his Spirit has illumined many witnesses. They have shown that everything may be obtained by prayer when we can obey with trust and humility the divine commandment of love and adhere to Christ's longing for the unity of all his disciples.

"The concern for restoring unity", the Second Vatican Council affirms, "involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the talent of each, whether it be exercised in daily Christian living or in theological and historical studies" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 5).

Our first common task is to pray. In praying, and praying together, Christians become more aware of their kinship, even if they are still divided; moreover, in praying we learn to listen to the Lord better because only by listening to the Lord and following his voice can we find the way to unity.

Ecumenism is, of course, a slow process, sometimes even discouraging when people yield to the temptation to "hear" rather than to "listen", to speak half-heartedly instead of speaking out courageously. It is not easy to give up a "convenient deafness", as though the unchanging Gospel were unable to flourish anew and reassert itself as a providential leaven of conversion and spiritual renewal for each one of us.

Ecumenism, as I said, is a slow process, it is a slow and uphill journey like every penitential process. However, it is a journey which, after the initial difficulties and even in their midst, also offers broad spaces of joy, refreshing stops, and from time to time allows one to breathe deeply the purest air of full communion.

The experience of the recent decades after the Second Vatican Council demonstrates that the search for Christian unity takes place at various levels and in innumerable circumstances: in parishes, in hospitals, in contacts between people, through the collaboration of local communities in every part of the world and especially in those regions where to make a gesture of good will for one's brother or sister demands a great effort and also a purification of memory.

The meetings and events that constantly mark my ministry, the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, Pastor of the universal Church, also fit into this context of hope, punctuated by practical steps towards the full communion of Christians.

I would like here to review the most significant events that took place in 2006 and were a cause for joy and gratitude to the Lord.

The year began with the official visit of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The International Commission of the Catholic Churches and the Reformed Churches entrusted to their respective authorities for consideration, a document that marks the end of a dialogue process that began in 1970, hence, it has continued for more than 36 years. The document is entitled: "The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God".

On [25 January 2006](#) - consequently, one year ago - the delegates for European ecumenism took part in the solemn conclusion of the "Week of Prayer for Christian Unity" in the Basilica of St Paul Outside-the-Walls. They had been convoked jointly by the Council of European Episcopal Conferences and by the Conference of European Churches for the first stage in the upcoming third European Ecumenical Assembly that will be held in Sibiu, on Orthodox territory, in September 2007.

I was able at the Wednesday Audiences to receive the delegation of the World Baptist Alliance and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that remains faithful to its regular visits to Rome.

I was also able to meet with the Hierarchs of the Orthodox Church of Georgia, which I follow with affection, nurturing the bond of friendship that bound His Holiness Ilia II to my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Pope John Paul II.

In continuing this resume of last year's ecumenical encounters, I come to the "Summit of Religious Leaders" held in Moscow in July 2006; with a special message, Alexei II, Patriarch of Moscow and All the Russias, requested communion with the Holy See.

The visit of Metropolitan Kirill from the Patriarchate of Moscow was also useful. It brought to the fore the intention to achieve a more explicit normalization of our bilateral relations.

Equally satisfying was the visit of priests and students from the *Diakonia Apostolica* College of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Greece. I am also pleased to recall that at its General Assembly in Porto Alegre the World Council of Churches gave Catholic participation ample room.

On that occasion, I sent a special Message. I also wished to send a Message to the General Assembly of the World Methodist Council in Seoul. Likewise, I recall with pleasure the cordial visit of the Secretaries of the *Christian World Communions*, organizations for reciprocal information and contact between the various denominations.

And as we review the events of the year 2006, we come to the [official visit last November of the Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of the Anglican Communion](#). In the *Redemptoris Mater* Chapel in the Apostolic Palace I shared with him and his entourage a meaningful moment of prayer.

Then, regarding the unforgettable [Apostolic Visit to Turkey](#) and the [meeting with His Holiness Bartholomew I](#), I would like to recall the many gestures that were even more eloquent than words. I take this opportunity to greet His Holiness Bartholomew I once again and I thank him for the letter he wrote to me upon my return to Rome; I assure him of my prayers and my commitment to take steps to ensure that that embrace of peace we exchanged during the [Divine Liturgy in St George's Church at the Phanar](#) may bring results.

The year ended with the [official visit to Rome of H.B. Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece](#), and we exchanged exigent gifts: the icons of the *Panaghia*, the "All Holy", and of Sts Peter and Paul embracing.

Are these not moments of lofty spiritual value, moments of joy in which to draw a breath on the slow ascent to unity, of which I spoke? These moments cast light on the commitment - often silent,

but strong - that brings us together in the quest for unity. They encourage us to make every effort to continue on this slow but important climb.

Let us entrust ourselves to the constant intercession of the Mother of God and of our Patron Saints, so that they may sustain us and help us not to withdraw from our good resolutions; so that they may encourage us to redouble all our efforts, praying and working with trust in the certainty that the Holy Spirit will do the rest. He will grant us full unity when and as he pleases. And strengthened by trust in this, let us go forward on the path of faith, hope and charity. The Lord will guide us.

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To special groups

I greet with affection all the English-speaking pilgrims present at today's Audience, especially the groups from Denmark and the United States of America. I pray that your visit to Rome will deepen your faith and hope in Christ, who alone can bring healing to our world. Upon all of you and upon your loved ones, I invoke God's Blessings of joy and peace.

Lastly, I address a greeting to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. Today, we are celebrating the liturgical memorial of St Francis de Sales, who pointed out the way of holiness as a call addressed to every state of life. Accept this invitation, dear *young people*, and respond generously to Christ who calls you to make the Gospel your rule of life. The Lord offers you, dear *sick people*, a privileged path to walk in conformity with his will: may you be able to welcome all the opportunities of grace offered by your particular condition. And you, dear *newly-weds*, following the teachings of St Francis de Sales, work every day to build your adherence to the Gospel in reciprocal love.

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