



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 21 January 2004

Reflection on the theme for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

"My peace I give to you" (Jn 14: 27)

1. *"My peace I give to you" (Jn 14: 27)*. This year, the week of prayer and reflection for Christian unity focuses on the words Jesus spoke at the Last Supper. In a certain sense they constitute his spiritual testament. The promise he made to his disciples was to be totally fulfilled in Christ's Resurrection. When he appeared to the Eleven in the Upper Room, he greeted them three times with the words: *"Peace be with you" (Jn 20: 19)*.

The gift Christ offered to the Apostles, therefore, is not any kind of "peace", but it is Christ's own peace: "my peace", as he says. And to make them understand, he explains more simply: My peace I give to you, *"not as the world gives it" (Jn 14: 27)*.

The world is longing for peace and needs peace, today as in the past, but often seeks it by inappropriate means, sometimes even with recourse to force or by balancing opposing powers. In these situations, people live with the distress of fear and uncertainty in their hearts. Christ's peace, instead, reconciles souls, purifies hearts, converts minds.

2. This year the theme of the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* was suggested by an ecumenical group in the city of Aleppo, Syria, which prompts me to remember the Pilgrimage I had the joy of making to Damascus. I recall with special gratitude the warm welcome I received from the two Orthodox Patriarchs and the Greek-Catholic Patriarch. That meeting lives on as a sign of hope for our ecumenical journey. Ecumenism, however, as the Second Vatican Council recalls, is not genuine unless there is *"interior conversion. For it is from newness of attitudes of mind, from self-*

denial and unstinted love, that desires of unity take their rise and develop in a mature way" (Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 7).

The need for a profound spirituality of peace and pacification is more and more keenly felt, not only by those who are directly involved in ecumenical work but by all Christians. Indeed, the cause of unity concerns every believer, called to belong to the one people of those redeemed by the Blood of Christ on the Cross.

3. It is encouraging to see that the search for unity among Christians is constantly spreading, thanks to timely initiatives that involve the various contexts of ecumenical commitment. Among these signs of hope I would like to list the growth of fraternal love and the progress recorded in the theological dialogues with the various Churches and Ecclesial Communities. It has been possible in these dialogues to reach important convergence, to a varying degree and with different specificity, on topics that were deeply controversial in the past.

Taking these positive signs into account, we must not be discouraged by the old and new difficulties we encounter, but face them with patience and understanding, relying always on divine help.

4. "*Wherever there is charity and love, there is God*": this is what the liturgy prays and sings this week, reliving the atmosphere of the Last Supper. From charity and reciprocal love flow the peace and unity of all Christians, who can make a crucial contribution to helping humanity rise above the causes of its divisions and conflicts.

Besides prayer, dear brothers and sisters, let us also feel strongly motivated to make our own the effort to be authentic "*peacemakers*" (cf. Mt 5: 9) in the places in which we live.

May the Virgin Mary, who witnessed the redemptive sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, assist us and accompany us on this path of reconciliation and peace.

The Holy Father then addressed the groups present in French, English, German, Spanish, Polish and Italian.

To the English-speaking visitors

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking visitors present at this Audience, particularly the pilgrims from Denmark, Finland, Japan and the United States. Upon you and your families I cordially invoke the Lord's gift of peace.

To young people, the sick and the newly-weds

My thoughts also go to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. Dear friends, in this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity I invite you, dear *young people*, to be witnesses of faithful Gospel adherence, especially with your peers. I ask you, dear *sick people*, to offer your sufferings for the cause of Christian unity. I urge you, dear *newly-weds*, to become increasingly one heart and soul in your families.

The Pope then led the prayer of the faithful dedicated to Christian unity in the various languages. Following the prayer, lambs were blessed for the Feast of St Agnes, and the Holy Father then imparted the Apostolic Blessing.