



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO IRELAND

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER CHURCHES

Saturday, 29 September 1979

My dear brothers in Christ,

Permit me to greet you in the love of our common Lord and Saviour, and with the words of his servant and apostle Paul: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (*Eph 1 :2*).

I am happy to have the opportunity to come together with you in the holy name of Jesus and pray with you. For all of us here today the great promise contained in the Gospel is truly encouraging and uplifting: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (*Mt 18 :20*). And so we rejoice exceedingly to know that Jesus Christ is with us.

We know that he is near to us with the power of his Paschal Mystery, and that from his Paschal Mystery we draw light and strength to walk in what Saint Paul calls "the newness of life" (*Rom 6 :4*).

What a great grace it is for the entire Christian world, that, in this our day, the Holy Spirit has powerfully stirred up in human hearts a real desire for this "newness of life". And what a great gift of God it is that there exists today among Christians a deeper realization of the need to be perfectly one in Christ and in his Church: to be one, in accordance with Christ's own prayer, even as he and his Father are one (cf. *Jn 17:11*)!

Our desire for Christian unity springs from a need to be faithful to the will of God, as revealed in Christ. Our unity in Christ, moreover, conditions the effectiveness of our evangelization ; it

determines the credibility of our witness before the world. Christ prayed for the unity of his disciples, precisely "so that the world may believe ..." (*Jn 17 :21*).

Today has indeed been a memorable day in my life: to have embraced in the love of Christ my separated Christian brethren and to confess with them "that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (*1 Jn 4 :15*) ; that he is "the Saviour of all men" (*1 Tim 5 :10*) ; that he is "the one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (*1 Tim 2 :5*). From Drogheda this morning I appealed for peace and reconciliation according to the supreme will of Christ, who alone can unify the hearts of men in brotherhood and common witness.

Let no one ever doubt the commitment of the Catholic Church and of the Apostolic See of Rome to the pursuit of the unity of Christians. Last November, when I met the members of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, I spoke of the "intolerable scandal of division between Christians". I said that the movement towards unity must not stop until it has reached its goal ; and I called for an energetic commitment by Catholic Bishops, priests and people to forward this movement. I said on that occasion: "The Catholic Church, faithful to the direction taken at the Council, not only wants to go forward on the way that leads to the restoration of unity, but is anxious, according to its means and in full submission to the promptings of the Holy Spirit ..., to strengthen at every level its contribution to this great movement of all Christians" ([Address of 18 November 1978](#)). I renew that commitment and that pledge today here in Ireland, where reconciliation between Christians takes on a special urgency, but where it also has special resources in the tradition of Christian faith and fidelity to religion which marks both the Catholic and the Protestant communities.

The work of reconciliation, the road to unity, may be long and difficult. But, as on the way to Emmaus, the Lord himself is with us on the way, always making "as if to go on" (*Lk 24 :28*). He will stay with us until the longed-for moment comes, when we can join together in recognizing him in the Holy Scriptures and "in the breaking of the bread" (*Lk 24 :35*).

Meanwhile, the internal renewal of the Catholic Church, in total fidelity to the Second Vatican Council, to which I pledged all my energies at the beginning of my papal ministry, must continue with undiminished vigour. This renewal is itself an indispensable contribution to the work of unity between Christians. As we each, in our respective Churches, grow in our searching of the Holy Scriptures, in our fidelity to and continuity with the age-old tradition of the Christian Church, in our search for holiness and for authenticity of Christian living, we shall also be coming closer to Christ, and therefore closer to one another in Christ.

It is he alone, through the action of his Holy Spirit, who can bring our hopes to fulfilment. In him we place all our trust : in "Jesus Christ our hope" (*1 Tim 1 :2*). Despite our human weakness and our sins, despite all obstacles, we accept in humility and faith the great principle enunciated by our Saviour : "What is impossible with men is possible with God" (*Lk 18 :27*).

May this day truly mark, for all of us and for those whom we serve in Christ, the occasion for ever greater fidelity, in prayer and penance, to the cause of Jesus Christ, and to his message of truth and love, of justice and peace. May our common esteem and love for the holy and inspired word of God unite us ever more, as we continue to study and examine together the important issues affecting ecclesial unity in all its aspects, as well as the necessity for a united service to a world in need.

Ireland, dear brothers in Christ, has special and urgent need for the united service of Christians. All Irish Christians must stand together to defend spiritual and moral values against the inroads of materialism and moral permissiveness. Christians must unite together to promote justice and defend the rights and dignity of every human person. All Christians in Ireland must join together in opposing all violence and all assaults against the human person—from whatever quarter they come—and in finding Christian answers to the grave problems of Northern Ireland. We must all be ministers of reconciliation. We must by example as well as by word try to move citizens, communities and politicians towards the ways of tolerance, cooperation and love. No fear of criticism, no risk of resentment, must deter us from this task. The charity of Christ compels us. Precisely because we have one common Lord, Jesus Christ, we must accept together the responsibility of the vocation we have received from him.

Dear brothers: with a conviction linked to our faith, we realize that the destiny of the world is at stake, because the credibility of the Gospel has been challenged. Only in perfect unity can we Christians adequately give witness to the truth. And so our fidelity to Jesus Christ urges us to do more, to pray more, to love more.

May Christ the Good Shepherd show us how to lead our people along the path of love to the goal of perfect unity: for the praise and glory of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

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