

Pope Benedict XVI - Address at Ecumenical Meeting - Thursday July 18

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I give heartfelt thanks to God for this opportunity to meet and pray with all of you who have come here representing various Christian communities in Australia. Grateful for Bishop Forsyth's and Cardinal Pell's words of welcome, I joyfully greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus, the "cornerstone" of the "household of God" (Eph 2:19-20). I am particularly happy to acknowledge the presence of Cardinal Edward Cassidy, former President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. I recall with gratitude his steadfast dedication to improving mutual understanding among all Christians.

Australia is a country marked by much ethnic and religious diversity. Immigrants arrive on the shores of this majestic land hoping to find happiness and opportunities for employment. Yours, too, is a nation which recognizes the importance of religious freedom. This is a fundamental right which, when respected, allows citizens to act upon values which are rooted in their deepest beliefs, contributing thus to the well-being of society. In this way, Christians cooperate, together with members of other religions, for the promotion of human dignity and for fellowship among all nations.

Australians cherish cordial and frank discussion. This has served the ecumenical movement well. An example would be the Covenant signed in 2004 by the members of the National Council of Churches in Australia. This document recognizes a common commitment, sets out goals, and acknowledges points of convergence without glossing over differences. Such an approach demonstrates not only the possibility of formulating concrete resolutions for fruitful cooperation in the present day, but also the need to continue patient discussion on theological points of difference. May your ongoing deliberations in the Council of Churches and in other local forums be sustained by what you have already achieved.

This year we celebrate the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Saint Paul, a tireless worker for unity in the early Church. In the scripture passage we have just heard, Paul reminds us of the tremendous grace we have received in becoming members of Christ's body through baptism. This sacrament, the entryway to the Church and the "bond of unity" for everyone reborn through it (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 22), is accordingly the point of departure for the entire ecumenical movement. Yet it is not the final destination. The road of ecumenism ultimately points towards a common celebration of the Eucharist (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 23-24, 45), which Christ entrusted to his Apostles as the sacrament of the Church's unity par excellence. Although there are still obstacles to be overcome, we can be sure that a common Eucharist one day would only strengthen our resolve to love and serve one another in imitation of our Lord: for Jesus' commandment to "do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19) is intrinsically ordered to his admonition to "wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:14). For this reason, a candid dialogue concerning the place of the Eucharist – stimulated by a renewed and attentive study of scripture, patristic writings, and documents from across the two millennia of Christian history (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 69-70) – will undoubtedly help to advance the ecumenical movement and unify our witness to the world.

Dear friends in Christ, I think you would agree that the ecumenical movement has reached a critical juncture. To move forward, we must continually ask God to renew our minds with the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 12:2), who speaks to us through the scriptures and guides us into all truth (cf. 2 Pet 1:20-21; Jn 16:13). We must guard against any temptation to view doctrine as divisive and hence an impediment to the seemingly more pressing and immediate task of improving the world in which we live. In fact, the history of the Church demonstrates that praxis is not only inseparable

from, but actually flows out of didache or teaching. The more closely we strive for a deeper understanding of the divine mysteries, the more eloquently our works of charity will speak of God's bountiful goodness and love towards all (cf. 2 Tim 1:8-10). Saint Augustine expressed the nexus between the gift of understanding and the virtue of charity when he wrote that the mind returns to God by love (cf. *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae*, XII, 21), and that wherever one sees charity, one sees the Trinity (*De Trinitate*, VIII, 8, 12).

For this reason, ecumenical dialogue advances not only through an exchange of ideas but by a sharing in mutually enriching gifts (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 28, 57). An "idea" aims at truth; a "gift" expresses love. Both are essential to dialogue. Opening ourselves to accept spiritual gifts from other Christians quickens our ability to perceive the light of truth which comes from the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul teaches that it is within the *koinonia* of the Church that we have access to and the means of safeguarding the truth of the Gospel, for the Church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" with Jesus himself as the cornerstone (Eph 2:20).

In this light, perhaps we might consider the complementary biblical images of "body" and "temple" used to describe the Church. By employing the image of a body (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-31), Paul draws attention to the organic unity and diversity that allows the Church to breathe and grow. Equally significant, however, is the image of a solid, well-structured temple composed of living stones rising on its sure foundation. Jesus himself brings together in perfect unity these images of "temple" and "body" (cf. Jn 2:21-22; Lk 23:45; Rev 21:22).

Every element of the Church's structure is important, yet all of them would falter and crumble without the cornerstone who is Christ. As "fellow citizens" of the "household of God", Christians must work together to ensure that the edifice stands strong so that others will be attracted to enter and discover the abundant treasures of grace within. As we promote Christian values, we must not neglect to proclaim their source by giving a common witness to Jesus Christ the Lord. It is he who commissioned the apostles, he whom the prophets preached, and he whom we offer to the world. Dear friends, your presence fills me with the ardent hope that as we pursue together the path to full unity, we will have the courage to give common witness to Christ. Paul speaks of the importance of the prophets in the early Church; we too have received a prophetic calling through our baptism. I am confident that the Spirit will open our eyes to see the gifts of others, our hearts to receive his power, and our minds to perceive the light of Christ's truth. I express heartfelt thanks to all of you for the time, scholarship and talent which you have invested for the sake of the "one body and one spirit" (Eph 4:4; cf. 1 Cor 12:13) which the Lord willed for his people and for which he gave his very life. All glory and power be to him for ever and ever. Amen!

Benedict XVI