



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOP FRIENDS
OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT**

Saturday, 2 December 2000

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate!*

1. This year again, during the usual meetings which every year bring together the Bishops who are friends of the Focolare Movement, you have wished to pause at the Apostle's tomb, to pass through the Holy Door together and to meet the Successor of Peter. I thank you for this visit, for your affection and for your spiritual closeness. I offer each of you a cordial welcome!

I first greet Cardinal Miloslav Vlk and express to him my deep gratitude for the courteous words he has spoken to me on behalf of you all. In addressing him, I would like to offer to each of you and to your respective communities my appreciation and encouragement for your persevering work of promoting unity among all believers in Christ. During this Holy Year, the intense desire to obey the Lord's command that "all may be one" (Jn 17: 11) has been, in a special way, the heart of the Jubilee spirit. I am pleased that you have been able to reflect and pray together for this great goal to which the Catholic Church has repeatedly affirmed her irrevocable commitment. For the ecumenical way is the Church's way.

2. "*Ut unum sint!*". Christ's ardent longing constantly echoes in the hearts of all those he has chosen as his disciples and sent out into the world to bear witness to his Gospel. You have wished to reflect on this burning desire over these days. The theme for your meeting this year has been: "*The cry of the abandoned Christ: light on the path to full communion among the Churches*". You have meditated on the anguish Christ felt in Gethsemane, when he experienced loneliness and abandonment in fulfilling the mission that the Father had entrusted to him. His total and trusting self-offering has become the measure of our action, since "the longing for unity goes hand in hand

with a profound ability to "sacrifice" (*Homily for the Opening of the Holy Door at St Paul-Outside-the-Walls*, 18 January 2000).

The ecumenical path thus finds its decisive model in the ultimate sacrifice of the Son of God, who for love of his brethren took upon himself every division, conquering in himself the sin of disunity among his own. How can we not see the urgent need for such a love in order to make ecumenical activity fruitful? How can we fail to follow in the depths of our hearts the example of Jesus, who "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (*Jn 13: 1*), going so far as to wash his disciples' feet?

3. In wishing to do the Father's work, Christ, our peace, wants to reconcile everyone with God in himself by means of his Cross, destroying hostility in his own body (cf. *Eph 2: 16*). We, the witnesses of his redemptive sacrifice, are called to become ever more profoundly his instruments and ministers of unity and sanctification. Above all through prayer, because reconciliation and the healing of divisions in the Church are a gift from above. It is the Spirit, in fact, who gathers God's children from every corner of the earth so that, through Christ, they may offer perfect praise to the Father with one heart. We must pray insistently for this Spirit, so that we may be gathered into one flock under one Shepherd, Christ.

However, prayer must be joined to a constant and sincere will to convert our hearts each day to the Gospel. The more we are able to think and act according to Christ's heart, the better we will know how to be faithful to his command. Unity is also a patient and far-sighted achievement of faith and love. It is necessary to let the Lord, who is the physician of souls, heal us inwardly from all selfishness.

4. Venerable and dear Brothers, passing through the Holy Door is a gift and admonition for everyone. It calls to mind the need to reread the complex and sometimes troubled history of our communities in the perspective of the one Church of Christ, where legitimate differences help to make the face of the Bride of the great King more radiant. This passage is an act of love, trust and repentance, so that the Lord's healing grace may relieve the sufferings caused by division and restore understanding to minds and hearts.

I am confident that the journey of reflection and prayer that you have made in these days will encourage you to return to your communities even more determined to bear witness by your words and lives to Christ's urgent prayer "that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us" (cf. *Jn 17: 21*).

This is also my prayer, which I entrust to Mary, the Immaculate Virgin. As I invoke abundant divine graces upon you and your loved ones, I cordially bless you all, along with the communities entrusted to your pastoral care.

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