



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE ASSEMBLY OF PRIMATES
OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION**

Thursday, 2 May 2024

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters, peace be with you!

I greet you with joy in the words of the Risen Lord, which proclaim the hope born of the Resurrection, the hope that does not disappoint. This was the experience of the disciples, gathered in the Upper Room, when Jesus took away their fear and distress, showing his wounds and his pierced side, and pouring out his Spirit upon them (cf. *Jn* 20:19-23).

Today too, when the leaders of God's people come together, they may feel fearful like the disciples, tempted to despondency, sharing their disappointments and unfulfilled expectations, letting their worries dominate them, and incapable of preventing their disagreements from widening. Yet today too, if we look to Christ rather than to ourselves, we will realize that the Risen One is in our midst and desires to grant us his peace and his Spirit.

I am grateful to His Grace Justin Welby for his fraternal words of greeting: he began his service as Archbishop of Canterbury around the same time that I began mine as Bishop of Rome. Since then we have had many occasions to meet, to pray together and to testify to our faith in the Lord. This year, during the celebration of Vespers on the Solemnity of the Conversion of Saint Paul, we commissioned a number of Catholic and Anglican bishops to minister together, in order to "be for the world a foretaste of the reconciling of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ". [1] Dear brother Justin, thank you for this fraternal cooperation on behalf of the Gospel! And I have not forgotten your marvellous work in South Sudan and that of your wife.

The Lord calls each of us to be a builder of unity and, even if we are not yet one, our imperfect communion must not prevent us from walking together. In fact, “relations between Christians... presuppose and from now on call for every possible form of practical cooperation at all levels: pastoral, cultural and social, as well as that of witnessing to the Gospel message.” [2] Our differences do not diminish the importance of the things that unite us: they “cannot prevent us from recognizing one another as brothers and sisters in Christ by reason of our common baptism”. [3] In this regard, I express my gratitude for the work of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission over the past fifty years, which has made great efforts to overcome various obstacles that stand in the way of unity, in the acknowledgment, first and foremost, that “the communion already shared is grounded in faith in God our Father, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit; our common baptism into Christ; our sharing of the Holy Scriptures, of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds; the Chalcedonian definition and the teaching of the Fathers; our common Christian inheritance for many centuries”. [4]

Brothers and sisters, the Easter season brings us back to our origins through our reading of the Acts of the Apostles. Amid so many glorious pages that speak of faith and fraternity, courage in the face of persecution, the joyful spread of the Gospel and its opening to the Gentiles, the sacred author does not conceal moments of tension and misunderstanding, often born of the frailty of the disciples, or different approaches to the relationship with past tradition. Yet the narrative as a whole makes clear that its true protagonist is the Holy Spirit: the Apostles come to mutual understanding and solutions by leaving the primacy to him. We sometimes forget that disagreements also marked the first Christian community, those who had known the Lord and had encountered him as risen from the dead. We must not be afraid of disagreements, but embrace them, leaving the primacy to the Paraclete. I very much like that expression from the Acts of the Apostles: “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us”. That is something very beautiful. We are called to pray and to listen to one another, seeking to understand each other’s concerns and asking ourselves, before enquiring of others, whether we have been docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, or prey to our own personal or group opinions. Surely, the divine way of seeing things will never be one of division, separation, or the interruption of dialogue. Rather, God’s way leads us to cling ever more fervently to the Lord Jesus, for only in communion with him will we find full communion with one another.

Today’s wounded world needs the appearance of the Lord Jesus! It needs to know Christ! Some of you come from lands in which war, violence and injustice are the daily bread of the faithful, yet even in countries thought to be affluent and peaceful, great suffering and poverty exists. What should be the message we offer in response, if not Jesus, the Saviour? Our mission is to make him known. In the wake of what Peter said to the lame man at the Temple gate, what we have to offer these troubled and needy times is not silver and gold, but Christ and the amazing good news of his Kingdom (cf. *Acts* 3:6).

Dear Primates of the Anglican Communion, thank you for choosing to meet this year in the City of

the Apostles Peter and Paul. It is a gift for me to feel close to the communities that you represent. I realize that the role of the Bishop of Rome is still a controversial and divisive issue among Christians. Yet, in the splendid phrase of Pope Gregory the Great, who sent Saint Augustine as a missionary to England, the Bishop of Rome is *servus servorum Dei*, the servant of the servants of God. Again, in the words of John Paul II, “this designation is the best possible safeguard against the risk of separating power (and in particular the primacy) from ministry. Such a separation would contradict the very meaning of power according to the Gospel: ‘I am among you as one who serves’ (*Lk 22:27*)”. [5] For this reason, it is necessary to engage in “a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject, a dialogue in which, leaving useless controversies behind”, [6] strives to understand how the Petrine ministry can develop as a service of love for all. Thanks be to God, positive results have been achieved in the various ecumenical dialogues on the question of primacy as a “gift to be shared”. [7]

As you know, the Catholic Church is engaged in a synodal journey. I rejoice that so many fraternal delegates, including a bishop of the Anglican Communion, took part in the first session of the General Assembly held last year, and I look forward to further ecumenical participation in the session to be held this autumn. I pray that a better understanding of the role of the Bishop of Rome will be among the fruits of the Synod. The Synthesis Report at the end of the first session called for a deeper study of the link between synodality and primacy at various levels, local, regional and universal. [8] The most recent work of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission may prove a helpful resource in this regard. [9]

So let us pray, journey and work together, with confidence and hope. The 2016 Joint Declaration stated that, “while, like our predecessors, we ourselves do not yet see solutions to the obstacles before us, we are undeterred. In our trust and joy in the Holy Spirit, we are confident that dialogue and engagement with one another will deepen our understanding and help us to discern the mind of Christ for his Church. We trust in God’s grace and providence, knowing that the Holy Spirit will open new doors and lead us into all truth.” [10] It would be a scandal if, due to our divisions, we did not fulfil our common vocation to make Christ known. If, on the other hand, beyond our respective visions, we are able to bear witness to Christ with humility and love, he will be the one to bring us closer to one another. I repeat: “Only a love that becomes gratuitous service, only the love that Jesus taught and embodied, will bring separated Christians closer to one another. Only that love, which does not appeal to the past in order to remain aloof or to point a finger, only that love which in God’s name puts our brothers and sisters before the ironclad defense of our own religious structures, only that love will unite us. First our brothers and sisters, the structures later”. [11] Brothers and sisters, thank you once more for this visit, which allows us to grow in communion. I am happy now to listen to what you would like to say to me and to join you in prayer.

- [1] *Commissioning of Bishops for the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission*, 25 January 2024 (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 24).
- [2] SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 40.
- [3] *Common Declaration of His Holiness Pope Francis and His Grace Justin Welby*, 5 October 2016.
- [4] ARCIC II, *The Church as Communion*, 50.
- [5] Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*, 88.
- [6] *Ibid.*., 96.
- [7] ARCIC II, *The Gift of Authority*, 60.
- [8] Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *A Synodal Church in Mission, Synthesis Report*, Part I.7.h.
- [9] Cf. ARCIC III, *Walking Together on the Way*.
- [10] *Common Declaration of His Holiness Pope Francis and His Grace Justin Welby*, 5 October 2016.
- [11] *Homily for Second Vespers of the Solemnity of the Conversion of Saint Paul*, 25 January 2024.