

UNITY OF THE CHURCH AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

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“Father, you are holy indeed, and all creation rightly gives you praise. All life, all holiness comes from you through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, by the working of the Holy Spirit. From age to age you gather a people to yourself, so that from east to west a perfect offering may be made to the glory of your name.” (Eucharistic Prayer 3) At the hour of His Passion Jesus prayed to His Father for unity in His Church. *“That they may be one. As You Father are in me and I am in You, may they also be one in us.”* Achieving the unity of all Christians within the unity of the one and only Church of Christ is beyond human powers and gifts alone. This is why we place all our hope in the prayer of Christ for the Church, the love of the Father for us and the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. The Church, which is the ‘body of Christ’, was born on the day of Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit was active in that event too. *“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard in his own language. And they were amazed and wondered, saying Are not all these men Galileans? And how is it that we hear each of us in his own native language?”* (Acts 2.1-4.)

The Holy Spirit was at work in the Church as the vivifier. The life He gave started to have immediate effect and has continued from age to age. The Holy Spirit’s coming consecrated the apostles as the chosen witnesses of Christ. It gave them the courage and strength to go out and proclaim the good news. Peter whom Christ had told (after the miraculous draught of fishes in the Sea of Galilee,) *“Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men’* (Lk. 5.10) having spoken to that multitude, caught his first catch. That day the infant Church grew by about 3000 people. A similar coming of the Holy

Spirit happens when we are baptised (made members of Christ's Mystical Body) and confirmed. We acquire a quite particular relationship directly with Jesus Christ. We are officially consecrated to Him as witnesses to the Church and to the world. Though as always God never takes away our free will. We are left to co-operate or not as we choose. If we choose to be witnesses to Christ, the Holy Spirit gives what grace is needed. However we have to pray for the fruits of that help, and co-operate with it. This is so whatever the form our witnessing takes, be it that of being pope, priest, parent, child or victim soul of substitution. *Therefore, in connection with the unicity and universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ, the unicity of the Church founded by Him must be firmly believed as a truth of Catholic faith. Just as there is one Christ, so there exists a single body of Christ, a single Bride of Christ: "a single Catholic and apostolic Church". Furthermore, the promises of the Lord that He would not abandon His Church (cf. Mt 16:18; 28:20) and that He would guide her by His Spirit (cf. Jn 16:13) mean, according to Catholic faith, that the unicity and the unity of the Church - like everything that belongs to the Church's integrity, will never be lacking.*

The continuity of the Catholic Church with the one Church founded by Christ remains one despite the divisions existing among Christians. *"The Catholic faithful are required to profess that there is an historical continuity - rooted in the apostolic succession - between the Church founded by Christ and the Catholic Church: "This is the single Church of Christ... which our Saviour, after his resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care (cf. Jn 21:17), commissioning him and the other Apostles to extend and rule her (cf. Mt 28:18ff.), erected for all ages as 'the pillar and mainstay of the truth' (1 Tim 3:15). This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him".* With the expression 'subsists in' the Second Vatican Council sought to harmonize two doctrinal statements: on the one hand, that the Church of Christ despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church, and on the other hand, that "outside of her structure, many elements can be found of sanctification and truth". That is, in those Churches and ecclesial communities which are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church. But with respect to these, it needs to be stated, "they derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church".

After the Resurrection, when Christ the Good Shepherd appeared to the Apostles by the Sea of Galilee Our Lord told St. Peter *“Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep”* (Jn. 21. 15-17) He entrusted Peter with the task of being His chief shepherd on earth, to search for, feed and care for His strayed and lost sheep. It is part of the Petrine office of every papacy. These fishers of men always have the grace of the Holy Spirit given them. If they co-operate with that grace the fruits follow. For this they must pray and are helped by our prayers, and our witness to Christ. The flock of Christ has to be gathered together within the fullness and unicity of the Catholic Church, so that from east to west a perfect offering of Christ, the Lamb of God, may be made to the glory of His Father’s name. *“The Lord Jesus, the only Saviour, did not only establish a simple community of disciples, but constituted the Church as a salvific mystery: He himself is in the Church and the Church is in Him (cf. Jn 15:1ff. Gal 3:28; Eph 4:15-16; Acts 9:5). Therefore, the fullness of Christ's salvific mystery belongs also to the Church, inseparably united to her Lord. Indeed, Jesus Christ continues His presence and His work of salvation in the Church and by means of the Church (cf. Col 1:24-27), which is His body (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-13, 27; Col 1:18). And thus, just as the head and members of a living body, though not identical, are inseparable, so too Christ and the Church can neither be confused nor separated, and constitute a single “whole Christ”. This same inseparability is also expressed in the New Testament by the analogy of the Church as the Bride of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph 5:25-29; Rev 21:2,9) Those Churches which, while not existing in perfect communion with the Catholic Church, remain united to her by means of the closest bonds, that is, by **apostolic succession** and a **valid Eucharist**, are true particular Churches. Therefore, the Church of Christ is present and operative also in these Churches, even though they lack full communion with the Catholic Church, since they do not accept the Catholic doctrine of the Primacy, which, according to the will of God, the Bishop of Rome objectively has and exercises over the entire Church.”*

The position of those Christian communities that have **not** preserved the **valid episcopate and integral substance of the Eucharist**, are not Churches in the proper sense; however, those who are baptized in these communities are, by Baptism, incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church. Baptism in fact tends per se toward the full development of life in Christ. *“The Christian faithful are therefore not permitted to imagine that the Church of Christ is nothing more than a collection - divided, yet in some way one - of Churches and*

ecclesial communities; nor are they free to hold that today the Church of Christ nowhere really exists, and must be considered only as a goal which all Churches and ecclesial communities must strive to reach". In fact, "the elements of this already-given Church exist, joined together in their fullness in the Catholic Church and, without this fullness, in the other communities". "Therefore, these separated Churches and communities as such, though we believe they suffer from defects, have by no means been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church". The lack of unity among Christians is certainly a wound for the Church, not in the sense that she is deprived of her unity, but "in that it hinders the complete fulfilment of her universality in history".

Some years ago Fr. Michael Clothier OSB spoke to this Tabernacle about Our Lady and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit working in her. He pointed out that the Holy Spirit works in each of us depending on our state of grace and the co-operation we give Him. With Mary, our Blessed Mother we too must say: *"Be it done to me according to your will"*. Given that co- operation, we will be Saints. St. John Vianney, the Cure of Ars, whose Feast it is today, pointed out the effect of such co-operation, *"If the damned were asked, why are you in hell? They would answer: **because we have resisted the Holy Spirit**. If those in heaven were asked, why are you in heaven? They would reply: **Because we were led by the Holy Spirit.**"*