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Ecumenism: that we may all be one

Benedicto XVI

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Address of Benedict XVI during the Apostolic Journey to Germany, on 2011 during an ECUMENICAL PRAYER SERVICE

Church of the former Augustinian Convent, Erfurt

Friday, 23 September 2011

[\(Video of Benedict XVI in Germany\)](#)

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through them” (Jn 17:20). These words Jesus addressed to the Father in the Upper Room. He intercedes for coming generations of believers. He looks beyond the Upper Room, towards the future. He also prayed for us. And he prayed for our unity. This prayer of Jesus is not simply something from the past. He stands before the Father, for ever making intercession for us. At this moment he also stands in our midst and he desires to draw us into his own prayer. In the prayer of Jesus we find the very heart of our unity. We will become one if we allow ourselves to be drawn into this prayer. Whenever we gather in prayer as Christians, Jesus’ concern for us, and his prayer to the Father for us, ought to touch our hearts. The more we allow ourselves to be drawn into this event, the more we grow in unity.

Did Jesus’ prayer go unheard? The history of Christianity is in some sense the visible element of this drama in which Christ strives and suffers with us human beings. Ever anew he must endure the rejection of unity, yet ever anew unity takes place with him and thus with the triune God. We need to see both things: the sin of human beings, who reject God and withdraw within themselves, but also the triumphs of God, who upholds the Church despite her weakness, constantly drawing men and women closer to himself and thus to one another. For this reason, in an ecumenical gathering, we ought not only to regret our divisions and

separations, but we should also give thanks to God for all the elements of unity which he has preserved for us and bestows on us ever anew. And this gratitude must be at the same time a resolve not to lose, at a time of temptations and perils, the unity thus bestowed.

Our fundamental unity comes from the fact that we believe in God, the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth. And that we confess that he is the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The highest unity is not the solitude of a monad, but rather a unity born of love. We believe in God – the real God. We believe that God spoke to us and became one of us. To bear witness to this living God is our common task at the present time.

Does man need God, or can we do quite well without him? When, in the first phase of God's absence, his light continues to illumine and sustain the order of human existence, it appears that things can also function quite well without God. But the more the world withdraws from God, the clearer it becomes that man, in his hubris of power, in his emptiness of heart and in his longing for satisfaction and happiness, increasingly loses his life. A thirst for the infinite is indelibly present in human beings. Man was created to have a relationship with God; we need him. Our primary ecumenical service at this hour must be to bear common witness to the presence of the living God and in this way to give the world the answer which it needs. Naturally, an absolutely central part of this fundamental witness to God is a witness to Jesus Christ, true man and true God, who lived in our midst, suffered and died for us and, in his resurrection, flung open the gates of death. Dear friends, let us strengthen one another in this faith! This is a great ecumenical task which leads us into the heart of Jesus' prayer.

The seriousness of our faith in God is shown by the way we live his word. In our own day, it is shown in a very practical way by our commitment to that creature which he wished in his own image: to man. We live at a time of uncertainty about what it means to be human. Ethics are being replaced by a calculation of consequences. In the face of this, we as Christians must defend the inviolable dignity of human beings from conception to death – from issues of pre-implantation diagnosis to the question of euthanasia. As Romano Guardini once put it: "Only those who know God, know man." Without knowledge of God, man is easily manipulated. Faith in God must take concrete form in a common defence of man. To this defence of man belong not only these fundamental criteria of what it means to be human, but above all and very specifically, love, as Jesus Christ taught us in the account of the final judgement (Mt 25): God will judge us on how we respond to our neighbour, to the least of his brethren. Readiness to help, amid the needs of the present time and beyond our immediate

circle, is an essential task of the Christian.

As I mentioned, this is true first and foremost in our personal lives as individuals. But it also holds true in our community, as a people and a state in which we must all be responsible for one another. It holds true for our continent, in which we are called to European solidarity. Finally, it is true beyond all frontiers: today Christian love of neighbour also calls for commitment to justice throughout the world. I know that Germans and Germany are doing much to enable all men and women to live in dignity, and for this I would like to express deep gratitude.

In conclusion, I would like to mention an even deeper dimension of our commitment to love. The seriousness of our faith is shown especially when it inspires people to put themselves totally at the disposal of God and thus of other persons. Great acts of charity become concrete only when, on the ground, we find persons totally at the service of others; they make the love of God credible. People of this sort are an important sign of the truth of our faith.

Prior to my visit there was some talk of an “ecumenical gift” which was expected from such a visit. There is no need for me to specify the gifts mentioned in this context. Here I would only say that, in most of its manifestations, this reflects a political misreading of faith and of ecumenism. In general, when a Head of State visits a friendly country, contacts between the various parties take place beforehand to arrange one or more agreements between the two states: by weighing respective benefits and drawbacks a compromise is reached which in the end appears beneficial for both parties, so that a treaty can then be signed. But the faith of Christians does not rest on such a weighing of benefits and drawbacks. A self-made faith is worthless. Faith is not something we work out intellectually and negotiate between us. It is the foundation for our lives. Unity grows not by the weighing of benefits and drawbacks but only by entering ever more deeply into the faith in our thoughts and in our lives. In the past fifty years, and especially after the visit of Pope John Paul II some thirty years ago, we have drawn much closer together, and for this we can only be grateful. I willingly think of the meeting with the Commission led by Bishop Lohse, in which this kind of joint growth in reflecting upon and living the faith was practised. To all those engaged in that process – and especially, on the Catholic side, to Cardinal Lehmann – I wish to express deep gratitude. I will refrain from mentioning other names – the Lord knows them all. Together we can only thank the Lord for the paths of unity on which he has led us, and unite ourselves in humble trust to his prayer: Grant that we may all be one, as you are one with the Father, so that the world may believe that he has sent you (cf. Jn 17:21).

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