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## **THE CHURCH, THE SUREST SEED OF UNITY FOR HUMANKIND**

**Third Sunday of Ordinary Time  
22 January 1978**

*Isaiah 9:1-4*

*1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17*

*Matthew 4:12-23*

My dear sisters and brothers, we find ourselves at the beginning of the third week of Ordinary Time. This period between the Epiphany and Lent is called Ordinary Time. After a few weeks it will be interrupted to commemorate the mystery of redemption, which we prepare for during Lent and celebrate during Holy Week. That celebration is then prolonged for fifty days from Easter until Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit. After Pentecost, Ordinary Time begins again. Thus, in this period between the Epiphany and Lent and then between Pentecost and Advent, there are thirty-three or thirty-four weeks that are called Ordinary Time. This time is characterized by the wearing of green vestments, a sign of the hope of a people on pilgrimage. Despite the routine and ordinariness of what for many can seem to be a desperate, weary, and difficult pilgrimage on earth, we as Christians ought always to carry this hope in our hearts. Even if life sometimes seems to have no meaning and we lose sight of the horizon, hope is the characteristic of Ordinary Time.

After the recent celebrations of Christmas and Epiphany, the gospels introduce us to the public ministry of Christ. Notice that the Sunday gospel readings are divided into three cycles: A, B, and C. These are three distinct cycles, and for this year, Cycle A, we will be reading the gospel of Saint Matthew during the thirty-four Sundays of Ordinary Time. During Cycle B we read the gospel of Saint Mark, and during Cycle C we read the gospel of Saint Luke. Thus in two years time we will begin the third cycle. The gospel of Saint John, so rich in content concerning the mystery of Christ, is placed before us during the most intense periods of the liturgical year such as Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. Therefore, if we are faithful to Sunday Mass for three years, we will have an understanding of all four Gospels.

Together with the gospel reading each Sunday, a passage from the Old Testament is chosen to show the concordance between the new Gospel of Christ—the fullness of time—and the Old Testament, which announced what was coming and reached its fulfillment in the New Testament.

The epistle, that is, the second reading each Sunday, is not exactly connected with the gospel reading or the first reading, but it is read throughout the three-year cycle so that we have some idea about the letters of the apostles. At this time, for example, we are reading Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. If we want, however, we can always search for links among all three readings. In this way the biblical message is synthesized in such a way that we can understand and live it better.

Why, then, do we preach on the gospel, on the Bible? The homily is like a timely reading or reflection, and that is why it is recommended after the readings. The word «homily» means to make real or actual; it means telling the assembly that has gathered together that this word, even though it comes from times long before us, is still meant for us as Catholics who have gathered together today, Sunday, January 22, 1978. Today, here and there, wherever people are reflecting on this word through the radio or through this humble, imperfect human intonation, the word is real. Do not regard the person who is speaking, but focus on the word that comes from God. The message of God is meant to orient us and give us life; it provides a Christian meaning to today's society and to the people of today.

## **Events of the week**

Accordingly, before expressing my thoughts about the biblical readings, I attempt to provide a historical framework for them because these words of Isaiah, Paul, and Matthew are not meant to be read in a way that separates them from our time. Rather, they should shed light on the events of this week; they should orient us and tell us something. As the Council says, «Every true mediator of the word of God ought to illuminate the signs of the times with the word of God. In this way they are able to give history and the actual moment in which we live a sense of transcendence that unites people with God and orients them toward God» (GS 11).

Who was not moved, for example, by the picturesque scene this week of children carrying their books and notepads and walking to school? This commencement of classes makes us reflect on this nationwide event. What does the church think about this beautiful scene of children and young people returning to school and of teachers receiving them back after their long vacation?

In the first place, sisters and brothers, we must praise the government's efforts to extend education to every part of our nation. It is certainly a great work, and hopefully there will be schools for everybody. At the same time the church, while praising the efforts made, wishes to express her thoughts about education and speak frankly in light of the Medellín documents. When we mention the Medellín documents, many people are alarmed, but that is because they don't understand them. Medellín expresses the church's thinking about the Latin American continent. It is true that many have misused these documents while others consider them to be taboo or view them with fear. Yet these documents are meant to provide Christian inspiration to the peoples of Latin America.

One of the Medellín documents (M 4) refers to education, and I base my reflections about the opening of our schools on this document. We have to criticize the educational process in Latin America because in general it does not correspond to the needs of people who are in search of development. The content of education is often abstract and formal; it is more concerned about transmitting facts than creating a critical spirit (M 4,4). True education ought to create a «critical spirit» in children and young people. In other words, students should not just swallow everything but should be alert and critical. They should not believe the news published in our papers simply because it appears in print. They should analyze and criticize. They should know how to analyze a new law that is enacted. They should be critical of their times and their surroundings.

Currently education is oriented toward «the maintenance of dominant social and economic structures» and does not contribute to the transformation that meets our people's needs (M 4,4). It is «standardized education» even though Latin America is today experiencing a great richness of human diversity. There are so many great human values in the different countries of America. True education must help students discover what is distinctive and creative in their particular culture. It should not impose a universal pattern for all countries.

In general, education in our Latin American countries promotes the desire *to possess more* (M 4,4), whereas today's youth demand rather *to be more*; they take joy in developing themselves through service and love. Let us not impart an education that creates in the mind of the student the hope of becoming rich and having the power to dominate. This does not correspond to the age we are living in. Let us form in the heart of the child and the young person the lofty ideal of loving and preparing to serve and give to others. Anything else would be education for selfishness, and we want to escape this selfishness which is precisely the cause of the great malaise in our societies.

The church must therefore propose an education that makes people «agents of their own development» (M 4,8), protagonists of history. Instead of a passively conformist crowd, our people should be persons who stand out for their intelligence, their creativity, and their desire to serve the nation. Education has to do with the development of individuals and peoples; it involves the «advancement of each and all from less human to more human conditions» (PP 20). Education should provide students a vision of development to which they are able to commit themselves. They should not expect to have things done for them; rather, they should see themselves as protagonists who can make their contribution to the transformation of America.

Creative education has to anticipate the new type of society that we are seeking here in Latin America (M 4,8). No one is satisfied with the kind of society we now have in our countries. If some people pretend to be satisfied, they are either protecting their own interests or trying to deceive someone. If we are sincere, however, we all want a better society, a better world. That is why the education we give in our schools has to anticipate—even in some small way—the shape of the society we desire in America. To this end, teachers, parents, and students should form a model community of love, collaboration, and mutual correction.

The church also wants education in Latin America to be personalized. All children and young people should become aware of their human dignity as persons and understand the meaning of free self-determination. They should have a sense of community and realize that no one can live all alone like a snail; their lives should be open to others. Education should open people to dialogue so that differences between generations and social classes do not become barriers that divide us but rather elements that mutually enrich us (M 4,8).

Education must also provide people with an appreciation for what is particular to each locality so that all can be integrated into the «pluralist unity of the continent and the world» (M 4,8). In other words, Salvadorans should recognize that they have Salvadoran values which are their distinctive contribution to the great concert of the world's nations. We must develop these unique, original values not selfishly, as if Salvadorans were the only people in the world, but rather out of a desire to enrich the pluralist concert of all the diverse countries with our Salvadoran spirit and all our beautiful qualities.

What a magnificent harmony would result if all the nations, instead of thinking only of themselves, thought about the concert of the God of all nations: «Sing a new song to the Lord of all the peoples because he has done marvelous deeds» (Ps 98:1). We need to educate everyone, sisters and brothers, about the organic change that this continent needs. In this way, then, the church is «in solidarity with the educational efforts» (M 4,9) of the countries, but I would also ask that everyone keep in mind the realities of our continent so that the church feels that her contribution is valid.

It was in this context that the pope recently spoke with our ambassador to the Holy See<sup>1</sup> and demanded for the church the unhindered freedom to fulfill her duty and the right to educate all her Christians in their baptismal faith. The church is not begging for alms here. She has a right to educate the members of society who through baptism have committed themselves to Christ, so that they might know how to live both as citizens of a Latin American nation and as citizens of the kingdom of God. They must prepare themselves as Salvadoran Christians to serve this earthly nation, but they must also translate the great hopes they have precisely as Christians into great Salvadoran realities.

That is why the church preaches, gathers groups together to reflect, and instructs people through catechesis. Despite the misinterpretations, she cannot remain silent. It is the church's duty to teach the Gospel in an integral way, and she is doing this in all the countries of Latin America. For this purpose, sisters and brothers, the church makes use today of what is called informal education; that is, she uses all the different means of communication to send her educational message out to all the parish communities, all the youth movements, and all the base communities. For example, it's wonderful to know that at this moment a poor teacher like myself is able to communicate this message of Christian education to so many communities! I know that in many communities people are listening to us on the radio, and in some communities loud speakers have been placed in the bell towers of the churches so that this message can reach the multitude of Christians in our archdiocese and tell them what Christ wants of each of us as Christians.

As you can see, this topic of education lends itself to profound reflection, but along with these comments I wish to invite our beloved teachers—with whom, thank God, we share many friendships—to share in these reflections. In this way you will be able to apply these reflections to your classrooms according to your Christian conscience and without betraying your duties as employees of the government. Here we are not simply talking about giving catechism lessons in the schools. Rather, we are speaking about teachers who follow the programs of the Ministry of Education but are also living witnesses. Your life is what is of interest to your students! You should be Christians who have achieved a synthesis between your life and your profession, between faith and culture, between your faith and your life. The teachers who live this synthesis are faithful to the government's programs and at the same time are faithful to the demands of their church, their Christ, and their baptism.

## **Church events and news**

Meanwhile, the church attempts to live her own reality as church, and as we gather together in this family setting to celebrate the 8:00 o'clock Mass, I'm very happy to share with you some news and some announcements concerning the church.

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<sup>1</sup> See *L'Osservatore Romano* (18 December 1977).

I want to express today my profound thanks to the wonderful priests, religious communities, and lay people who signed that document of solidarity that appears on the first page of *Orientación*<sup>2</sup>. I thank you not for my own sake since I am not personally deserving, but because of what it means for the bishop as a sign of unity. It might even be said that anyone who touches the archbishop touches the soul of the church. It is not a vain feeling but a conviction of faith that leads me to think this way. These unjust slanders cause me pain not for my person but for my office because they tear the church apart. That is why I am grateful for this call to solidarity, and I recommend that you read and reflect on the statement that appears in *Orientación*.

I want to express my delight also with the congregation of the Sisters of Bethany who this week celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of their founding. May the Lord make them a community that is able to serve the church during these difficult moments of transformation. And may all of us—religious, laity, and priests—understand the need for this renewal in order be at the service of a church that wishes to renew herself and serve the world. In the same line, I extend my congratulations to the Guadalupana Sisters and the Carmelite Missionaries who during the coming months will also be celebrating the jubilees of their founding.

On behalf of the Carmelites I want to invite all of you to a celebration that will take place here in San Salvador on February 11, the feast of our Lady of Lourdes, a day when we honor the Virgin of those who are ill. On that day those who are sick are invited to come together at the grotto of Lourdes, next to the school that is under the direction of the Carmelite Sisters. This is how the sisters would like to celebrate the anniversary of their founding. At this time, then, I invite all families with sick members to take them to that gathering where we will celebrate a Mass and anoint them with the oil of the sick. In this way we will bestow on their illnesses a sense of consecration.

While talking about the religious life, I also want to share with you news of a marvelous meeting that took place in Chalatenango from January 18 to 20. Some twenty religious women who work in the communities of that department met together to plan their activities for the year. Their labors in the different communities of that region are closely coordinated with the pastoral priorities of the archdiocese, and there is much reason for hope there. We greet these heroic sisters working in remote villages and harvesting much fruit. May the Lord bless you!

I also ask a blessing for the women religious who are meeting together today in the Colegio de la Asunción; the religious communities of the whole country have been invited. This week there were celebrations in the communities of San Antonio Abad. Many of you have already heard about the great quantity of fireworks that were set off during the celebration of their patronal feast. In Ciudad Delgado and other places, people celebrated the feast of their patron Saint Sebastian, who has many devotees among us.

What is most important, sisters and brothers, I have left for last, to serve as a framework for today's homily: on Wednesday began the special celebration of the week of prayer for the unity of Christians. This has been a very gratifying experience. Wednesday we were in the church of El Rosario and Thursday in the beautiful chapel of the Marist Brothers in

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<sup>2</sup> «To Touch the Archbishop is to Touch the Heart of the Church: Pronouncement of Solidarity of the Priests of the Archdiocese» in *Orientación* (22 January 1978).

the Liceo Salvadoreño. On Friday we were in the First Baptist Church where the pastor and the congregation received us with graciousness and true Christian hospitality. Last night we gathered here in the cathedral, and tonight we will once again meet here in the cathedral. Tomorrow, Monday, we will be in the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Barrio San Jacinto and then on Tuesday in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. Wednesday will mark the end of the week, and I especially invite you to come here to the cathedral at 7:00 o'clock in the evening. Every night, as we gather at 7:00 o'clock, we express the desire that Jesus expressed in his gospel: «Father, may all who believe in me be united so that the world will believe that you have sent me» (John 17:21). In view of this, I call on Protestants of good will—I underline this phrase because we have found that some Protestants are not good-willed and do not believe in the prayer of Christ that unites all who believe in him. But I call on the great many non-Catholic Christians of good will—whom we call Protestant to give them a name—to join the Catholics who have accepted this invitation to bond together as one family of followers of Christ's gospel. We come together to pray that the differences that hinder the evangelization of the world might disappear. As long as we are divided, we are a hindrance to this process, but when we are united and can present the Gospel as one single Christian congregation, then the world will be converted. Let us never doubt that!

Today my reflections on the word of God follow this line of thought. I would like to call this homily, «The Church, the Surest Seed of Unity for the Human Race». The Council states this same idea: the church is the «sure seed of unity, hope, and salvation for the whole human race» (LG 9). I want to offer you these three thoughts: first, God becomes present in human history in Christ; second, Christ, as God's presence in history, calls all people to conversion and collaboration; and third, the lack of unity among Christians is an obstacle to the kingdom of Christ. We therefore issue a call to unity both to Catholics within the church and to non-Catholic Christians outside the church.

### **God becomes present in human history in Christ**

In the first reading my first thought is expressed in a very eloquent way by the prophet Isaiah: «In former times the Lord humbled the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, but they are now filled with joy because of the Lord's presence» (Isa 9:1). Saint Matthew in his gospel, seeking to connect the Old Testament with the New, announces that Christ preached precisely in these lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, a part of Galilee. The gospel reports that the words of the prophet were fulfilled: «Land of Zebulun and land of Nephtali, the way to the sea—the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen» (Matt 4:15-16). What a magnificent way to portray the presence of Christ in history! That little corner of Palestine, belonging to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, was the first region to be invaded by Teglatfalasar III, the king of Assyria who wanted to conquer all of Palestine. A pagan empire in the Holy Land cast its shadow over the lands of Nephtali and Zebulun. That is why the prophet spoke of the humiliation of these tribes. That prophet, however, foreseeing the events that Matthew spoke about, announced a time of joy when light and freedom would once again appear over these lands enslaved by foreign invaders.

Isaiah describes this moment when he says, «You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, as they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as men make merry when dividing spoils». And listen carefully to what follows: «For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulders, and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed as on the day of Midian» (Isa 9:2-3). At Midian the warrior Gideon won the battle in a very unique way, and so the

victory was easy (Judg 7:14-22). The prophet Isaiah says that God's kingdom will come to break «the rod of the taskmaster». The yoke was the symbol of subjugated people who were placed under a heavy burden. God will break this yoke and give the people freedom. Those oppressed will sing with joy because God has visited them and saved them. My brothers and sisters, this is how God acts when he becomes present among people: he destroys the yokes and the rods of the oppressors. This is what every man and woman, every family and every people, ought to cry out for when they feel humiliated, afflicted, and depressed like the people of Zebulun and Nephtali: there is reason to hope!

The prophet was not deceived. Something began to change on earth when Christ appeared in those lands curing the sick, raising the dead, preaching to the poor, bringing hope to the people. It was like when a stone is cast into a quiet lake—ripples appear, and they spread until they reach the shores. Christ appeared in Zebulun and Nephtali with the same signs of liberation: he broke the oppressive yokes, he brought joy to the hearts of people, and he sowed hope in their hearts. This is what God is doing now in history.

That is why the church insists on preaching this joyful presence of God in history. Let no one destroy this joy, sisters and brothers. Let us all experience the love with which God visits us, for God truly loves us. Even though he sometimes permits the humiliation of Zebulun and Nephtali to purify the people of their sins, God has not abandoned us. God is with us. Let us maintain this great gift of faith! Let us pray and call upon our God! I am saddened to see so many pessimistic people who think that all is lost, that we are in a dead-end street. This cannot be! Perhaps we are living in the dark times of Zebulun and Nephtali, or we may feel like Isaiah, who did not experience the presence of Christ who came eight centuries later. We do not have to wait eight centuries, because Christ is present now in our history. We await something else, something I will talk about in the second point of my reflection.

### **Christ calls all people to conversion and collaboration**

My second thought is this: Christ has come and is calling people. Look at the beauty of this gospel! «Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"» (Matt 4:17). The passage we read today recounts the vocation of the first four apostles: Peter and Andrew, who were brothers, and John and James, also brothers. Christ called them by the lakeside where they were fishing: «Come, leave everything; I need you. I will make you fishers of men!» (Matt 4:19). And they followed him. After these first four vocations, Christ called more and more people. The call of Christ went out to all women and men.

God has given life to every person to follow a vocation. Not everyone is called to the vocation of sacred ministry, as I have been, but your vocation as laypersons is the married life, a profession, or working in the economic, political, and social arenas. Political office is also a place where one is able to serve God.

Christ calls everyone, but he calls them to conversion. I have explained to you already the meaning of this word. Conversion means orienting oneself in a certain direction. Military officers give an order like «left face, right face». We say instead, «face toward Christ». Christ says, «Be converted» (Matt 4:17). This is the condition for following Christ: being converted. Conversion is necessary to bring about the liberation people hope for. In proclaiming this conversion, therefore, the church must point out the kingdom that is opposed to the kingdom of God, namely, the kingdom of sin. Preaching that does not denounce sin is not the preaching

of the Gospel. Preaching that makes sinners feel good and entrenches them in their sinful state is a betrayal of the Gospel's call. Preaching that causes sinners no discomfort but lulls them deeper into sin is like leaving Zebulun and Naphtali in the shadow of death (Matt 4:15-16; Isa 9:1-2). Preaching that awakens and enlightens people is like a light that is turned on. If some people are asleep, naturally they are disturbed, but they wake up! That is the preaching of Christ: «Wake up! Be converted!» This is also the church's authentic preaching. Naturally, sisters and brothers, such preaching gives rise to conflict; it forfeits worldly prestige; it bothers people and will surely be persecuted. The church's preaching cannot get along with the powers of darkness and sin.

«Be converted», then, is the call that Christ extends to us. And if among those who are converted there are men and women who feel the call to follow Christ more closely, then there arises in the people of God the sacred vocation: «Come, and I will make you fishers of men» (Matt 4:19). This is precisely the experience of the young men preparing to enter the seminary and of those preparing for the priesthood. I hope that this word awakens many young hearts in many homes to the meaning of a sacred vocation. Some young women may want to consecrate their love in the manner of the virgin Saint Agnes whose feast we celebrated yesterday. Agnes's family wanted her to marry a pagan man, but she stated that she was already mystically married to Christ. For remaining faithful to this mystical union with eternal Love, she died as a virgin and martyr.

Many young men and women now feel this call of Christ! Many feel the impulse of the Spirit of God who calls them! A woman religious told me recently, «Look at how vocations are flourishing! You should see how many young women are asking about becoming religious sisters». In the seminary Father Segura has much the same experience. His own hopes have been more than fulfilled: there is not enough room for all the young men who feel called to this vocation. The lads are preparing themselves in their homes and their schools, waiting for the time when we'll be able to accept them.

There is tremendous anticipation, sisters and brothers. The call to conversion has awakened many hearts that were asleep in sin, like the people in Zebulun and Nephtali. These people thought that the church was meddling in politics and other areas where she had no business. Now they have finally understood that we are simply preaching the kingdom of God, which means pointing out sin in any human situation even when the sin is found in political and economic situations. The church must be the voice of Christ; she must declare, «Be converted, for the kingdom of God is at hand» (Matt 4:17). Those who want to enter this kingdom must draw close to God by being converted and repenting of their sins. This has been the cry of the church in these recent times: conversion. Therefore, sisters and brothers, *be converted!* I am the first to need conversion. We all need conversion, for as the Apocalypse says, «The righteous must still do right, and the holy still be holy» (Rev 22:11). Naturally, those who are in sin must be restored to God's grace and renounce all forms of injustice and selfishness and violence. Let us become friends of God, for God has no part in sin.

### **Division among Christians is an obstacle to the kingdom of Christ**

My third thought, then, is this: if Christ calls everyone to join together in his plan of salvation, as the Council tells us, then everything that separates us from this plan of Christ is sin. Disunion is sin.

The Council uses a very beautiful phrase in speaking of the church; it calls her «a messianic people». You and I and all of us are part of this messianic people. The Council states, «This messianic people»—here I am thinking about all of you—«even though it does not yet include all people and frequently appears as a small flock, is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope, and salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a communion of life, charity, and truth, it is also used by him as an instrument for the redemption of all and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth» (LG 9; Matt 5:13-14).

What a tremendous honor, dear Christians! And I say «Christians» because we are in the week of unity; the word «Christians» doesn't mean only Catholics but includes the two other great branches of Christianity that broke away from this unity. One is the Orthodox branch there in the East; in the eleventh century they separated from communion with Peter, with the Holy See. The Council says that this separation occurred because of the sins of human beings (UR 3). The other branch, called Protestantism, arose from the Reformation in the sixteenth century, starting with Luther. From this movement arose the diverse sects that are now called Evangelical or Protestant.

These two great secessions have broken the unity of Christianity. But we are all Christians! There are many things that unite us. With the Eastern churches, for example, we share so many beautiful things! The first councils, which proclaimed our faith in the Trinity and the incarnation of God made man, took place in an atmosphere of unity with the Eastern churches. We remember with wistfulness that our great dogmas unite us with that branch that drew away from us.

Later, in the sixteenth century, Protestantism proclaimed free reading of the Bible, and they separated from the authoritative teaching of the church in order to interpret the Scriptures in their own way. Yet they have not lost their love of Scripture and their love of Christ. They still love them intensely, perhaps more than some Catholics who are not really Christian at all. For if they were Christian, not to say Catholic, they would not be so hateful; they would not malign and tear Christianity apart the way they do.

Consequently, today the word «Christian» means being called to become part of this great family of unity. Today the church is working in union with Protestants toward closer communion. But I want us to have very clear ideas about the unity we are seeking with our separated sisters and brothers. The Council says that this unity has to be based on interior conversion (UR 7), and I have felt this very much during these nights. As Catholics and Protestants, we are sincerely seeking Christ through a conversion to the Lord. The Council also speaks of communion in prayer, which may not lead to conversion in all our beliefs, but it need not separate us from one another (UR 8).

The Council also speaks of mutual knowledge (UR 9). Sisters and brothers, I believe a large part of this division between us and the Protestants is due to lack of knowledge. Often neither they nor we know much about one another's psychology and ways of thinking. When we draw close to one another, however, we see the good will on both sides just as we also see the human failings and limitations of both sides.

In regard to this mutual knowledge the Council asks something important: fidelity to doctrine (UR 11). Please do not go about saying that the archbishop is becoming a Protestant

because he's visiting Protestant churches; or that there are no differences between Catholics and Protestants because the cathedral opens its doors to Protestants so that they can sing and preach here. We are not saying that. We are saying that we must all be faithful to our own doctrine. Catholics know that they cannot be shaken from their belief in confession and the Eucharist, their love for the Virgin, their devotion to the saints, or their obedience to the pope. Catholics can never betray their belief in these things. Protestants must also be faithful to what they believe in conscience to be true.

Nevertheless, this faithfulness to our respective doctrines does not prevent us from cooperating with one another in those things that unite us (UR 12). For example, today it is most helpful for Christians to work together in the cause of human dignity, in the promotion of peace and justice, in the social application of the Gospel, and in the Christian inspiration of the arts and literature. There are many areas in which we Catholics and Protestants are able to unite in love instead of fighting among ourselves. Even while we acknowledge profound doctrinal differences, there are many similarities which will help us to overcome our differences as we come to know one another better so that very soon the dream of Christ can be fully realized: «Father, may they be one, one flock under one shepherd» who is Christ our Lord (John 17:21; 10:16).

Dear sisters and brothers, this is the call of the word of God for us today. How appropriate that during this week of unity we should be called to pray intensely so that the unity that Christ desires may become a reality! As we shape God's presence in history through Christianity, may all the people of the world find our church united, the surest seed of unity, hope, and love. Let us stand now and proclaim our faith.