

DAY 1

18 JANUARY

Jesus' prayer: That all may be one

The Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity begins today. During these days, together with the whole Church we will meditate more deeply on some words spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper that enkindle our desires for union. After more than thirty years spent living among us, Christ *knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father (Jn 13:1)*. In the face of his imminent betrayal and suffering, his Heart burns with love for his disciples, and *He loved them to the end*. Just a few hours before being arrested, He leaves us as an inheritance three marvellous gifts as an inheritance: the washing of the feet, the gift of the Holy Eucharist, and his teachings in the discourse during the Last Supper.

In the long farewell discourse that St John records for us, Jesus beseeches the Father for the unity of those who, down through the centuries, will come to be his disciples: *Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are one (Jn 17:11)*. During this octave, the Church encourages us to unite ourselves to Jesus' filial prayer, and to identify ourselves more fully with the sentiments in his Heart and his ardent longing for unity.

When our Lord said "keep those whom you have given me, that they may be one, as we are one," his followers were still few; the

Gospel was confined to a limited geographical and social milieu. But the Heart of Jesus reached out much further, embracing the entire Church down through the centuries, with all its hopes and difficulties. Christ prays for our unity, because He knows how important it will be for the spread of the faith and as a motive of credibility for his followers: *I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me* (Jn 17:20–21).

The Second Vatican Council tells us that “human powers and capacities alone cannot achieve this holy objective – the reconciling of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ. It is because of this that the Council rests all its hope on Christ’s prayer for the Church.”¹ Unity is a gift that we receive from God. And so Pope Benedict XVI reminded us that “we cannot ‘bring about’ unity by our powers alone. We can only obtain unity as a gift of the Holy Spirit.”² During this week of prayer for Christian unity, we want Jesus’ intense petition to the Father to resound in our hearts in a special way. All the words spoken by the Son of God should move our hearts, and now we have another opportunity to be surprised anew by them. St Josemaría, spurred by this desire for unity, wanted all the faithful of the Work to ask in the *Preces* each day for this gift: *Ut omnes unum sint sicut tu Pater in me et ego in te!*

Origin of the custom and importance of unity

On the hundredth anniversary of this Octave in the Church, Pope

¹ Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 24.

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to ecumenical meeting at the Twentieth World Youth Day*, 19 August 2005.

Benedict XVI spoke of its origin: “When it was introduced, it proved a truly fruitful intuition. Fr Paul Wattson was an American Anglican who later entered the communion of the Catholic Church and founded the *Society of the Atonement* (Community of Brothers and Sisters of the Atonement); in 1908, with another Episcopalian, Fr Spencer Jones, he launched the prophetic idea of an octave of prayer for Christian unity.”³ This initiative spread rapidly and, eight years later, Benedict XV decided to extend it to the entire Church.⁴

The dates for the octave have been the same from the start: from 18 to 25 January, both significant dates in the liturgical calendar then in use: “In the calendar at that time, the Feast of the Chair of St Peter, who is the firm foundation and sure guarantee of the unity of the entire People of God, was celebrated on 18 January, while on 25 January, then as today, the liturgy celebrates the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul.”⁵

On one feast we recall the mission that Christ entrusted to Peter and, through him, to his successors: to strengthen all his disciples in the faith. The other feast makes clear to us that the path for attaining unity is personal conversion, made possible thanks to a personal encounter with the risen Christ. Both feasts – the Chair of St Peter and the Conversion of St Paul – direct our eyes to the Person of Christ, who is the One in whom we will all be united at the end.

St John Paul II reminded us that “ecumenism, the movement promoting Christian unity, *is not just some sort of ‘appendix’* which is added to the Church’s traditional activity.”⁶ Rather, it is an organic part of her mission and stems from taking seriously the task which Christ left us, and for which he prayed to the Father before his

³ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, 23 January 2008.

⁴ Cf. Pope Benedict XV, Brief *Romanorum Pontificum*, 25 February 1916.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, 23 January 2008.

⁶ St John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, 20.

Passion. “Unity is our common mission; it is the condition that enables the light of Christ to be spread better in every corner of the world, so that men and women convert and are saved.”⁷ It is a path we are invited to follow, as good sons and daughters, listening attentively to the Spirit of the Lord.

Recognising Christ in others

The farewell discourse during the Last Supper was not the first time Jesus had urged his disciples to strive to remain united. At different moments he had stressed to them that they are called to serve one another as brothers and sisters, since *you have one teacher, and you are all brethren ... you have one Father, who is in heaven ... you have one master, the Christ (Mt 23:8-10)*. As Pope Francis said: “By the working of the Holy Spirit, we have become one in Christ, sons in the Son, true worshippers of the Father. This mystery of love is the deepest ground of the unity which binds all Christians and is much greater than their historical divisions. To the extent that we humbly advance towards the Lord, then, we also draw nearer to one another.”⁸

The Second Vatican Council recognized that, among the endowments which together build up and give life to the Church, many can also be found outside its visible confines, including “the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit.”⁹ In all these realities, it is the same operative force of Christ that is impelling us all towards unity. The effort of ecumenism seeks, through different paths, to strengthen this communion and lead it towards the full and visible

⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 25 January 2006.

⁸ Pope Francis, Homily, 25 January 2015.

⁹ Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 3.

union of all of Jesus' followers.¹⁰ Hence it is an act of justice and charity to recognize the riches of Christ present in all those who – at times even at the cost of shedding their blood – give testimony to Him.

During this octave of prayer for the unity of Christians, we ask our Lord Jesus Christ to help us share in his longing for unity in the Church. We will help to foster unity if we allow ourselves to be converted personally to the risen Christ, reproducing in our own life his way of being and acting, his desire to be the servant of everyone (cf. *Mk* 10:44), in order to undertake a dialogue of charity with our brothers and sisters. “Christ’s example leads us to begin a dialogue; his example teaches us how we should speak with our fellow men.”¹¹ Throughout this octave, we will invoke the Holy Spirit during the Mass, so that with his help we may be “gathered into one”,¹² and “become one body, one spirit in Christ.”¹³ With filial trust we place the fruit of these days of prayer in the hands of Mary, Mother of the Church and Mother of all Christians.

¹⁰ Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Address, 26 January 2006.

¹¹ St Josemaría, *Letter 24 October 1965*, 15.

¹² Eucharistic Prayer II.

¹³ Eucharistic Prayer III.

DAY 2

19 JANUARY

Prayer: the centre of every ecumenical endeavour

Jesus meets his apostles in the Upper Room on the eve of the Passover. Our Lord knows that his hour has come; He will no longer sit at table with them again, but will wait for them when He has gone to the Father. The apostle St John, who was present in those important moments, before giving an account of the events of that night, describes Jesus' feelings: *having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end* (Jn 13:1). It is precisely this love of Christ – a love which He also has for each one of us – that led him to ask his Father, minutes later, for the unity of his disciples throughout the centuries. Ecumenism, said St Josemaría, presupposes “the desire to enlarge the heart, to open it to all mankind with the redemptive zeal of Christ, who seeks all men and takes in all men, for he has loved all mankind first.”¹

Unity is a manifestation of charity: it is born of our union with God and overflows into a love that does not separate us from others and that never says “enough.” We Christians “feel that our hearts are enlarged,” St John Chrysostom said in a homily. “Just as heat expands a body, so charity has an expanding power, because it is a warm and ardent virtue.” Consequently, as St John Paul II points

¹ St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 11.

out, “we proceed along the road leading to the conversion of hearts guided by love which is directed to God and, at the same time, to all our brothers and sisters, including those not in full communion with us. Love gives rise to the desire for unity, even in those who have never been aware of the need for it.”²

Moved by his intimate union with the Father and his thirst for souls, Jesus prays: *I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one (Jn 17:23)*. This desire for unity invites us also to pray in close union with Jesus’ prayer, *for all Christians and with all Christians*. The primacy of prayer is undoubtedly at the heart of the whole ecumenical effort on the road to unity.

“If Christians meet more often and more regularly before Christ in prayer, they will be able to gain the courage to face all the painful human reality of their divisions, and they will find themselves together once more in that community of the Church which Christ constantly builds up in the Holy Spirit, in spite of all weaknesses and human limitations.”³ This praying together, as Pope Benedict XVI points out, “is not, therefore, a voluntaristic or purely sociological act, but rather an expression of faith that unites all Christ’s disciples.”⁴

Personal conversion so as to purify the memory

Seated beside St Paul’s tomb, Pope Francis pointed out that an authentic search for unity means entrusting ourselves, in sincere prayer, to the Father’s mercy. We humbly ask God’s forgiveness for our divisions, which are an open wound in the Body of Christ. Our atonement extends also to those brothers and sisters separated by the un-Christian behaviour of Catholics in the past. Similarly, we

² St John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, 21.

³ St John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, 22.

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, 23 January 2008.

Catholics atone when, today or in the past, we have been offended by other Christians. “We cannot erase what is past,” continued Pope Francis on that occasion, “nor do we wish to allow the weight of past transgressions to continue polluting our relationships.”

Certainly, as the Second Vatican Council points out, in the acts of separation between Christians sometimes “both sides were to blame. The children who are born into these Communities and who grow up believing in Christ cannot be accused of the sin involved in the separation, and the Catholic Church embraces them as brothers, with respect and affection.”⁵ The foundation of ecumenical commitment lies in the conversion of hearts. In this way, with our hearts renewed, we will contemplate the past with the clear eyes of Christ, and He will grant us the grace necessary to purify our memory, freeing it from misunderstanding and prejudice.

St Paul’s life is a good example of this. His conversion was “not a passage ... from a mistaken faith to a correct faith (his faith was true, even if incomplete), but rather it was a matter of being conquered by Christ’s love. It was the renunciation of his own perfection, the humility of the one who places himself without reserve at the service of Christ for the brethren. And only in this renunciation of ourselves, in this conformity with Christ can we be united also among ourselves, do we become ‘one’ in Christ.”⁶ Certainly, commitment to unity and prayer for unity do not apply only to those who live in a state of division; on the contrary, we too are called not to ignore this concern in our personal dialogue with God. With the assurance of the communion of the saints, we pray in unison with our brothers and sisters throughout the world: *that we may all be one.*

⁵ Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 3.

⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 25 January 2009.

Practical ways: dialogue and work in common

Prayer and personal conversion are our main means of working for Christian unity. It could even be said that the best form of ecumenism consists in striving to live according to the Gospel, in order to bring to life the image of that Christ with whom we wish to be united. At the same time, we must be sincerely interested in establishing a dialogue with our separated brothers. In order to do this, it is good to remember, first of all, that “the truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power.”⁷ Authentic ecumenical dialogue avoids all forms of reductionism, syncretism or superficial agreement, and is based on love for the truth. Only by looking at others with Jesus’ eyes and listening to them attentively can we perhaps even see certain aspects of the richness of the Christian message with new clarity.

Along with dialogue, another very effective way to promote Christian unity is to work together. More and more areas are opening up for ecumenical collaboration, especially with regard to making the Gospel present in society. St Josemaría said that since the spirit of *Opus Dei* encourages personal initiative in our apostolate and in our work, it can be fruitful in generating “many points of easy contact with our separated brethren. Here they find, put into living practice, a good many of the doctrinal presuppositions in which they, and we Catholics, have placed so many well-founded ecumenical expectations.”⁸

There are thus two ways of working for unity: on the one hand, prayer and conversion of heart; and on the other, dialogue and collaboration with other Christians. Trusting in the power of the prayer of the whole Church during this octave, we go to Mary with

⁷ Second Vatican Council, Declaration *Dignitatis humanae*, 1.

⁸ St Josemaría, *Conversations*, 22.

simplicity. Her docility to the Holy Spirit is a precious example of a true ecumenical attitude.

DAY 3

20 JANUARY

Unity within the Church

At the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, immediately after Jesus' Ascension, we find this description of the first Christians: *all these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14)*. And, a little later, describing the life of that first community, St Luke also tells us that *the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common (Acts 4:32)*. On the third day of the Octave for Christian unity, using these quotations from Sacred Scripture, we want to meditate on one of the four notes of the Church: her unity.

Thinking about this unity that was lived by the first followers of Jesus, St Josemaría reminded us that “it is an essential part of the Christian spirit not only to live in union with the ordinary hierarchy – the Pope and the bishops – but also to feel at one with the rest of one’s brothers in the Faith ... We must rekindle the sense of fraternity which was so deeply felt by the early Christians. It will help us to feel united, while loving at the same time the variety of our individual vocations.”¹ All the baptized are called to foster unity within our Mother the Church and to avoid everything that

¹ St Josemaría, *Conversations*, 61.

leads to division, because “unity is a sign of life.”² This task must spread throughout the Body of Christ in concentric circles. First we learn to love and live unity in our own family, with those closest to us; then unity within the Church, loving the different charisms inspired by the Holy Spirit; finally, we desire and seek unity also with non-Catholic Christians.

This interior unity is a gift from God which is also backed up by our personal efforts to overcome the barriers and remove the obstacles that hinder it. With our eyes fixed on that unity which the first Christians lived, we ask our Lord for the grace to appreciate the variety that we find within the Church, through which she “appears as a rich and vital organism not a uniformity, fruit of the one Spirit who leads everyone to profound unity, because she welcomes differences without eliminating them and thus brings about a harmonious unity.”³

The order of charity

In the scenes of the Gospel we see how Christ interacts with very different groups of people: with teachers of the Law, with workers, with people He met during religious and social events which took place in the environment He moved in or with the large crowds He preached to. Yet we also witness that, because of circumstances of space and time, not everybody was treated with the same intensity from the human point of view. “Our Lord,” the Prelate of Opus Dei tells us, “often dedicated longer periods of time to his friends.”⁴ Thus we see, for example, that He spends afternoons in the house of Bethany or that He takes time off to be alone with his closest disciples.

² St Josemaría, *The Way*, 940.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, 24 January 2010.

⁴ Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Letter, 1 November 2019, 2.

Similarly, in our desire for unity among all Christians we cannot forget what St Thomas Aquinas calls the *ordo caritatis*, the order of love, which leads us to be concerned first of all about unity with those who have been more directly entrusted to us in the Church. St Josemaría pointed out that in the Work “we have always loved those who are not Catholic: we love everyone in the world! But with order, with the order of charity. First of all, our brothers and sisters in the faith.”⁵

He based his teaching here on St Paul’s Letter to the Galatians, where the Apostle exhorts us to strive to do good to all, but especially to those with whom we share the same faith (cf. *Gal* 6:10).

Authentic charity is universal and, at the same time, ordered. When we meditate on unity in the Church, it is natural that our thoughts should be directed first of all to the real communion that we have with our brothers and sisters in the Work, with whom we are united with strong bonds of fraternity, beginning with those we live with in the same house. “Let there be nothing among you that can divide you,”⁶ St Ignatius of Antioch insisted. This unity, lived according to the example of Christ, makes us happy and attracts others.

Unity in variety

After speaking to the Corinthians about the radical equality of all the members of the Mystical Body of Christ, St Paul continues: *But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? ... Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with*

⁵ St Josemaría, *Instruction*, May 1935-14 September 1950, note 151.

⁶ St Ignatius, *Letter to the Magnesians*, 6.

tongues? (1 Cor 12:18-19, 29-30). The Church exercises her mission through the work of all her children, although in different ways; she needs everyone to carry out the divine plans.

The great variety of vocations and charisms that exist in the Church is “the multiform richness of the Mystical Body, within its divine unity: a single Body with a single Soul; with but one mind, one heart, one way of feeling, one will, one desire. But a multitude of organs and members.”⁷ Within the admirable plurality displayed in the Church’s unity, Our Lord has wanted to establish different ways of serving. The Second Vatican Council notes in particular that “the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs.”

That is why “it would be a great mistake to confuse unity with uniformity and to insist, for example, on the unity of the Christian vocation, without considering at the same time the diversity of vocations and specific missions which fit within that general call and which develop their multiple aspects for the service of God.”⁸ “The important thing,” St Josemaría emphasised, “is for everyone to try to be faithful to their own divine calling. Only thus can we contribute to the Church the benefits deriving from the special charism each has received from God.”⁹

The first Christian community in Jerusalem persevered united in prayer and charity *cum Maria, Matre Iesu* (Acts 1:14). Around Our Lady, the Church of our time too will also grow in unity if we live together with our brothers and sisters, each one trying to carry out faithfully the mission we have received.

⁷ St Josemaría, *Letter 15 August 1953*, 3.

⁸ St Josemaría, *Letter 15 August 1953*, 4.

⁹ St Josemaría, *Conversations*, 61

DAY 4:

21 JANUARY

The Church is holy in her origin and in her ends

The Church was founded by Christ in keeping with the Father's will, and is constantly assisted by the Holy Spirit. Thus the Church is the result of the ongoing work of the Most Holy Trinity. The second note of the Church, her holiness, is based on this reality: that she comes forth from the Most Blessed Trinity. Pope Francis points out that this awareness of the Church's holiness "is a characteristic that has been present from the beginning in the consciousness of early Christians, who were simply called 'the holy people' (cf. *Acts* 9:13, 32, 41; *Rom* 8:27; *1 Cor* 6:1), because they were certain that it is the action of God, the Holy Spirit who sanctifies the Church."¹

The Church is holy because she comes from God the Father who is holy. She is holy because Jesus Christ our Lord is holy, and through his sacrifice on the Cross *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her (Eph 5:25-26)*. She is holy because she is guided by the Holy Spirit, the inexhaustible fount of holiness, who was sent "on the day of Pentecost in order that He might continually sanctify the Church."² We can say, in addition, that the Church is holy because her aim is the glory of God

¹ Pope Francis, General Audience, 2 October 2013.

² Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 4.

and she seeks our true happiness. And, finally, the Church is holy because the means she uses to attain her end are also holy: the Word of God and the Sacraments.

Although we are convinced of this wonderful reality, we cannot but recognize that, despite her Trinitarian origin and her saving means, the Church's visible holiness can be hidden beneath the sins of her members. St Josemaría says that Sacred Scripture "applies to Christians the title of *gens sancta* (1 Pet 2:9), a holy nation, composed of creatures with infirmities. This apparent contradiction marks an aspect of the mystery of the Church."³ When we consider the beauty of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, and all the reasons why she is holy, it can help renew our desire to show forth in our own lives the light of her holiness, in her origin, means and ends.

The struggle for holiness in her members

We need to contemplate the mystery of the Church with the eyes of faith. "It would be a sign of very little maturity," St Josemaría insisted, "if, in view of the defects and miseries in any of those who belong to the Church (no matter how high they may be placed by virtue of their function), anyone should feel his faith in the Church and in Christ lessened. The Church is not governed by Peter, nor by John, nor by Paul; she is governed by the Holy Spirit, and the Lord has promised that he will remain at her side always, to the close of the age (*Mt 28:20*)."⁴

It is not surprising that those who are eager to draw close to the Church look to her members, since we are called to embody the joyful message that has been entrusted to us. Often it is we Catholics who have not known how to reflect the holiness of our

³ St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 6.

⁴ St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 7.

Mother the Church and we have “concealed rather than revealed the authentic face of God.”⁵ Our faith in the Church’s holiness should lead us to ask our Lord insistently for the holiness of each of her members, because we realize how much we need his help. As Pope Benedict XVI said in an ecumenical encounter: our holiness of life must be the heart of the ecumenical movement.⁶

In this light, the defects of the Church’s members – including our own faults and sins – should strengthen our desire for personal conversion and lead us to make reparation and to pray with greater insistence, while at the same time never forgetting that the Church’s holiness resides principally in Christ himself. “The Catholic Church knows that, by virtue of the strength which comes to her from the Spirit, the weaknesses, mediocrity, sins and at times the betrayals of some of her children cannot destroy what God has bestowed on her as part of his plan of grace.”⁷ Hence, with firm trust in God’s plans, St Josemaría reminded us: “Our Mother is holy, because she was born pure and will continue without blemish for all eternity. If at times we are not able to perceive her fair face, let us wipe clean our own eyes. If we are aware that her voice does not please us, let us remove from our ears any hardness which prevents us from hearing in her tone of voice the whistled beckoning of the loving Shepherd.”⁸

The saints are a bond of unity

It should fill us with hope to remember that “throughout history and now as well, there have been so many Catholics who have truly sanctified themselves: young and old, single and married, priests

⁵ Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 19.

⁶ Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Address, 19 August 2005.

⁷ St John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, 11.

⁸ St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 8.

and lay people, men and women. But it happens that the personal sanctity of so many faithful – then and now – is not something externally apparent. Frequently we do not recognize the ordinary people, common and holy, who work and live alongside us.”⁹ Holiness is the most beautiful face of the Church and it shines forth in many people around us: in those who strive to serve and make life more pleasant for those around them; in those who work tirelessly to obtain what is needed for their families; in those who bear powerful witness to the faith by accepting many difficulties, including illness or old age, with serenity. Even though all these efforts may go unnoticed, they truly bring strength to the Church and also foster unity.

In addition, many Christians have already been beatified or canonized and serve as a stimulus to those of us still on the way. Since we are all part of the one same Church and members of the same Body, this multitude of saints protects and sustains us and guides our steps.¹⁰ Among them we find many who, through divine inspiration, have in different ways helped promote unity among all Christians: St John Henry Newman, who worked to revive a Catholic spirit in the Anglican Church before he converted; St Elizabeth Hesselblad of Sweden, who came from a Lutheran family and reformed the Brigittine Order; St Josephat, a Ukrainian who died striving for the unity of Christians in Slavic lands; Blessed Maria Sagheddu, an Italian Trappist nun, who offered her life for the unity of Christians and died when only 25, near Rome; St John Paul II, who worked tirelessly for ecumenism during his pontificate; and so many Catholic and non-Catholic martyrs who bore witness to their faith together, as happened in Uganda with the catechist St Charles Lwanga and his companions. Discovering

⁹ St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 5.

¹⁰ Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 24 April 2005.

examples of holiness among our separated brethren can give a strong impulse to the quest for unity.

The Second Vatican Council, in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, states that the members of the Church, realizing they are called to promote unity, “strive to increase in holiness by conquering sin. And so they turn their eyes to Mary, who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues.”¹¹ By loving Mary, *Mater Ecclesiae*, we are led to a greater love for the Church. She will teach us to feel responsible for the holiness of all the members of Christ’s Mystical Body, a necessary path for attaining unity among all Christians.

¹¹ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 65.

DAY 5

22 JANUARY

The Church is catholic and universal by nature

St Josemaría prayed the Creed with deep devotion, savouring the fact that he belonged to the Church and so was part of God's family. During Mass or when visiting St Peter's Basilica, he recited the Creed with a special devotion, which we see reflected in that point in *The Way*: "*Et unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam!*... I can understand why you pause, in your prayer, savouring the words: I believe in the Church, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic."¹ On this fifth day of the Christian Unity Octave we will meditate on the third note of the Church: her catholicity or universality.

When the risen Christ was about to depart from this world and ascend into heaven, He gathered together the Eleven and said to them: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age* (Mt 28:18-20). Ten days later, at Pentecost, the Apostles received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and they went out into the streets of Jerusalem and then to all the

¹ St Josemaría, *The Way*, 517.

pathways of the world, to announce the good news of our Lord. That day, in the city of David, people of all tongues *from every nation under heaven* (Acts 2:5) heard their preaching.

The Church is catholic because she has been sent by our Lord to everyone on earth. “The ultimate goal of those sent by Jesus is universal.”² The Second Vatican Council described Christ’s command in these words: “All men are called to belong to the new people of God. Wherefore this people, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages.”³

St Josemaría said that although the Catholic Church’s geographical extension is a visible sign of her universality, “the Church was catholic already at Pentecost. It was born catholic from the wounded heart of Jesus, as a fire which the Holy Spirit enkindled.”⁴ Our life of faith requires us to care for this catholicity: we should pray for our brothers and sisters in the faith on every continent; we should be eager to see Jesus’ name known and loved in every corner of the world; we must feel as our own the difficulties the Church is going through in places perhaps far from us. All this is also part of our relationship with Christ, “for sanctity does not admit of any frontiers.”⁵

A sign of catholicity: diversity in matters open to opinion

In the years after Pentecost Christ’s message gradually spread among the Mediterranean lands, and pagans began to join the ranks of the first Christians. In order to preserve unity, the Apostles at the

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Vol II, p. 323.

³ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 13.

⁴ St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 9.

⁵ St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 10.

Council of Jerusalem left us this standard of freedom: they decided with regard to converts who were not from the Jewish faith *to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things* (Acts 15:28). They understood that the life of the Church is aimed above all at offering the simple message of the Gospel and a personal encounter with Jesus.

Together with catholicity, the Church defends and fosters legitimate variety in all that God has left to the free initiative of men. In the Work we have learned from the beginning not only to respect that diversity but to foster it actively: “Because the Work’s aims are exclusively supernatural, its spirit is one of freedom, of love for the personal freedom of all men. And since this is a sincere love for freedom and not a mere theoretical statement, we love the necessary consequence of freedom which is pluralism. In Opus Dei pluralism is not simply tolerated. It is desired and loved, and in no way hindered.”⁶

This pluralism is a characteristic feature of St Josemaría’s message, which leads us to strive to bring Christ’s love to every corner of the world and to all human activities. Hence the Prelate of Opus Dei points out that “a person who loves freedom manages to see the positive and attractive aspects of what others think.”⁷ And he insists that “the attitude of valuing people who are different, or who think differently, denotes inner freedom and openness.”⁸ “From this freedom,” St Josemaría says, “will flow a healthy sense of personal responsibility ... and you will not only know how to give up your own opinion when you see that it does not fit well with the truth, but you will also be able to accept the views of others, without feeling humiliated because you have changed your ideas.”⁹

⁶ St Josemaría, *Conversations*, 67.

⁷ Monsignor Fernando Ocariz, Letter, 9 January 2018, 13.

⁸ Monsignor Fernando Ocariz, Letter, 1 November 2019, 13.

⁹ St Josemaría, *Letter 9 January 1951*, 23-25.

Zeal for souls should lead us to become all things to all men

Our contribution to the Church's expansion, spreading the good news of Christ everywhere, is the fruit of a generous self-giving. We know that these efforts of ours will later be transformed into the joy of having made others happy. That is why we are not satisfied with reaching just a few people or only those who meet certain conditions. Our apostolic zeal leads us to speak to everyone about our Lord Jesus Christ: "Ask with me for a new Pentecost, which will once again set the world alight."¹⁰

St Paul is called the *Apostle of the Gentiles* because he spread the faith far and wide, without excluding anyone. He himself summed up his evangelizing work: *For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more ... To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some (1 Cor 9:19, 23)*. Even in the midst of the great difficulties the Church underwent in its beginnings, the first Christians, aware of the universality of the Gospel, took on the duty of spreading the faith to neighbouring regions. As Pope Francis said, thanks to the wind of persecution "the disciples went further with the seed of the word and sowed the word of God."¹¹ St Josemaría likewise urged us to follow the example of the first Christians and overcome any comfort-seeking in our eagerness to spread the faith: "Christians must show readiness at all times to get on with everyone, giving to all – by the way they treat others – the possibility of getting closer to Christ Jesus."¹²

In order to spread the Church everywhere it is important to go

¹⁰ St Josemaría, *Furrow*, 213.

¹¹ Pope Francis, Homily, 19 April 2018.

¹² St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 124.

deeper into the basics of the faith. In this way we will learn to communicate it in all its fullness and learn how to bring it to each person taking into account their way of being and culture. “When a Christian understands what catholicity means and practises it, and he realizes the urgent need to proclaim the Good News of salvation to all creatures, he knows that as the Apostle teaches, he has to make himself *all things to all men, that all may be saved.*”¹³

We conclude our prayer by having recourse to our Lady, who looks upon all men and women as her children, and we ask her to help us make Christ known everywhere we go. Mary will teach us to take advantage of the opportunities offered us by our work and our social and family relations to bring God’s joy to many hearts.

¹³ St Josemaría, *The Forge*, 953.

DAY 6

23 JANUARY

Christ wanted to found the Church on the apostles

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles, after narrating the coming of the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire upon the disciples who were gathered in Jerusalem, records a characteristic shared by the first Christians: *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42)*. Today, in our prayer, we consider the last of the four notes of the Church: her apostolicity.

St Josemaría points out that “the preaching of the Gospel does not arise in Palestine through the personal initiative of a few fervent individuals. What could the Apostles do? They counted for nothing in their time. From a human point of view they were neither rich nor learned, nor heroes. Jesus places on the shoulders of a handful of disciples an immense, divine task. *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you (Jn 15:16)*.

“Through two thousand years of history, the apostolic succession has been preserved in the Church. ‘The bishops’ – declares the Council of Trent – ‘have taken the place of the Apostles and are placed, as the Apostle (Paul) himself says, by the Holy Spirit to govern the Church of God’ (*Acts 20:28*).”¹ In the same way St Paul, writing to those living in Ephesus, a city which worshipped gods made with human hands, reminds them that having been baptised in the name of Christ they became *fellow citizens with the*

¹ St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 12.

saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles (Eph 2:19).

We rest on the same foundation as the first Christians. Through the apostolic succession, the Church maintains over time the certainty of continuing to work for God, in obedience to the mission given by Christ himself: *Go and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19)*. Moreover, this is the way to preserve and transmit with certainty the words heard from the apostles themselves: *Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me (2 Tim 1:13)*. Today we can thank our Lord for the apostolicity of the Church and pray that all Christians may be brought together – in virtue of their divine origin – in the one people of God.

All Christians are called to be apostles

“Whenever we read the Acts of the Apostles,” said St Josemaría, “we are moved by the audacity, the confidence in their mission and the sacrificing joy of Christ’s disciples. They do not ask for multitudes. Even though the multitudes come, they address themselves to each particular soul, to each person, one by one: Philip, to the Ethiopian (see Acts 8:26-40); Peter, to the centurion Cornelius (see Acts 10:1-48); Paul, to Sergius Paulus (see Acts 13:6-12).”² To understand the apostolicity of the Church, we have to share in the fervour of the first disciples, who worked with the awareness of having discovered in Christ the most important thing in their lives. St Paul goes so far as to say it in words that set fire to the world: *For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ (Phil 3:8)*.

Pope Francis stresses that “being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can

² *Ibid.*

happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey. In this preaching, which is always respectful and gentle, the first step is personal dialogue, when the other person speaks and shares his or her joys, hopes and concerns for loved ones, or so many other heartfelt needs.”³ Every Christian, wherever he or she is, is the presence of the Church itself, which wants to spread its joy and light in the world. Participating in the transmission of the Gospel unites us to that task of the early times; it makes us experience the apostolicity of the Church, which is based on the words and life of Jesus Christ.

St Josemaría reminds us that the apostles always maintained this missionary zeal because “they have learned from the Master. Remember the parable of the labourers who awaited work, in the middle of the marketplace of the village. When the owner of the vineyard went out, already late in the day, he found that there were still labourers standing idle: *Why do you stand here idle all day? Because no one has hired us (Mt 20:6-7)*, they answered. This should not happen in the life of a Christian. No one should be found around us who can assert that they have not heard of Christ, because no one has bothered to tell them.”⁴ The apostolate for a Christian is not a task limited to a specific time, nor an activity reserved only for certain situations: a Christian is always an apostle.⁵

Apostolate ad fidem and ad gentes

This sense of mission, which is born of baptism, was also a characteristic of the work with souls that St Josemaría encouraged from the beginning. That is why he affirmed, with a truth that has been demonstrated for many years, that “the Work has a special love

³ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 127-128.

⁴ St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 15

⁵ Cf. Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Letter, 14 February 2017, 9.

for the apostolate *ad fidem* ... and directs its efforts *ad gentes*,”⁶ that is, to all those who have not yet received the consolation of Christ. “You know well,” he also wrote, “the breadth of vision, the charity we have always shown to those who do not share our faith, to those who are not within the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church. From the beginning we have had these souls as friends, and so often as cooperators in our apostolic work.”⁷

The model for opening ourselves to all people has always been the life of the early Christians. Starting from Jerusalem, they spread out to all known cultures, nations and languages, following the command that Jesus had given to his disciples: *Go therefore and make disciples* (Mt 28:19). In this way, with the passing of the centuries, “many souls have come to the fullness of faith through this gentle road of charity,” St Josemaría wrote. “Thank God for this, and ask him for fortitude and humility so that you may never stifle the action of grace and may always be good instruments of his. I repeat: never judge rashly, be good friends of everybody, respect the freedom of others and the freedom of grace; and, at the same time, profess your faith with deeds and with words.”⁸

With our sincere friendship open to all men and women, “there are no shared moments that are not apostolic: everything is friendship and everything is apostolate, without being able to distinguish them.”⁹ Trusting in the intercession of the apostles, we wish, like the first Christians, to persevere in their teaching and in their desire to bring the friendship of Christ to those around us, just like the first Christians. We ask Mary, Queen of the Apostles, to help us to have gratitude and appreciation, always in a new way, for the apostolicity of the Church. And, at the same time, to kindle our

⁶ St Josemaría, *Instruction*, May 1935-14 September 1950, 146.

⁷ St Josemaría, *Letter 24 October 1965*, 56

⁸ St Josemaría, *Letter 24 October 1965*, 62.

⁹ Monsignor Fernando Ocariz, *Letter*, 1 November 2019, 19.

hearts with the fire of Christ: *Fac ut ardeat cor meum in amando Christum Deum*, make my heart burn with love for Christ, my God.¹⁰

¹⁰ Hymn, *Stabat Mater*.

DAY 7

24 JANUARY

Christ chooses St Peter and his successors

Jesus dedicated the three years of his public life to announcing throughout the land of Israel the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven. He did so with his preaching, his miracles and his very presence. At a given moment, when some of the leaders of the people were hardening their hearts against Him, He withdrew with his Apostles to territories outside Israel. These journeys may be seen as foreshadowing the universality of the Gospel. And it was there, in the district of Caesarea Philippi, that Our Lord said to Peter publicly, in the presence of his chosen ones, *I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it (Mt 16:18)*. At that point, this was a promise for the future; his Passion and Death, Peter's denial and the cowardice of the other Apostles still lay ahead. The risen Jesus, in a conversation at the lakeside after the miraculous catch of 153 large fish, recalled what He had said to Peter previously. Now He officially endowed him with a special task within the chosen group: *Feed my lambs ... Tend my sheep (Jn 21:15-16)*.

Pope Benedict XVI point out that St Peter in fact “began his ministry in Jerusalem, after the Ascension of the Lord and Pentecost.” Afterwards he travelled to Antioch, the third most important

city in the Roman Empire. And “from there, Providence led Peter to Rome ... So it is that the See of Rome, which had received the greatest of honours, also has the honour that Christ entrusted to Peter of being at the service of all the particular Churches for the building up and unity of the entire People of God.”¹

The institution of the Papacy shows clearly that the Kingdom founded by Christ is no utopian ideal, but is already present in this world, as a visible society. It is made up of real people, with defects, but Christ promised that, down through the centuries, whoever became his representative on earth would not lack his grace. *Behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren* (Lk 22:31-32). As we reflect on all of this, we can understand the filial emotion that St Josemaría felt when he first arrived in Rome. On 23rd June 1946, as he saw the dome of St Peter’s from the car, he was visibly moved, and recited the Creed aloud. Afterwards he spent the whole of his first night in Rome on the balcony of the apartment where he was staying, which was very close to the Vatican, in a vigil of prayer for the Church and the Pope. “Think how confidently I prayed for the Pope, contemplating the windows of the Papal apartments.” St Josemaría would often say that “love for the Roman Pontiff must be in us a delightful passion, for in him we see Christ.”²

*The Papacy as an institution affirms universality
in unity*

One of the most important episodes in the Acts of the Apostles is the baptism of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, who became a

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, 22 February 2006.

² St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 13.

Christian, together with his whole household. Cornelius had gathered many of his relatives and friends to listen to Peter, who said: *God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean* (Acts 10:28). After answering some questions, he added, *Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him* (Acts 10:34-35). This was the first time St Peter had addressed people who were not Jewish. In the middle of his discourse, to everyone's amazement, the Holy Spirit came down on those who were gathered there. St Jerome commented on this passage: "This man's baptism by the Apostle consecrated the salvation of the Gentiles."³

From the very first moments of the expansion of Christianity, Peter's mission was to unite his brethren and affirm the catholicity, the universality, of the Church founded by Christ, who had entrusted the Church to him as her visible head. Pope Benedict XVI says that "St Peter's journey to Rome, as representative of the world's peoples, comes especially under the word '*one*': his task was to create the *unity* of the *catholica*, the Church formed by Jews and pagans, the Church of all the peoples. And this is Peter's ongoing mission: to ensure that the Church is never identified with a single nation, with a single culture or with a single State but is always the Church of all; to ensure that she reunites humanity over and above every boundary and, in the midst of the divisions of this world, makes God's peace present, the reconciling power of his love."⁴

When Jesus instituted a visible head for his pilgrim Church on earth, he was not turning his followers into a closed group but just the opposite. The Pope, as St Peter's successor, presides over

³ St Jerome, *Epistola* 79,2.

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 29 June 2008.

everyone in charity, and he is vigilant to ensure that all those who have been called to follow Christ know that they are hearing Christ's own Word no matter where they are. Peter and the other Apostles, the Pope and the bishops in communion with him, are the guarantee that what is being passed on is the true Church of Christ. In the early days, this one Church was passed on to the Gentiles in the Roman Empire, and afterwards to every country on earth. "I venerate with all my strength the Rome of Peter and Paul," wrote St Josemaría, "bathed in the blood of martyrs, the centre from which so many have set out to propagate throughout the world the saving word of Christ. To be Roman does not entail any manifestation of provincialism, but rather of authentic ecumenism. It presupposes the desire to enlarge the heart, to open it to all mankind with the redemptive zeal of Christ, who seeks all men and takes in all men, for he has loved all mankind first."⁵

*Union with the Pope also means union with his
magisterium*

St Paul, in the years following the revelation he had received at Damascus, explored the mystery of Christ in progressively greater depth, to the point of recognizing that he himself was an Apostle too. And yet, strikingly, after carrying out his apostolate for several years, he went to see St Peter, to check his teachings with the head of the Church. *I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, he wrote to the Galatians, and remained with him fifteen days ... Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up by revelation; and I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain (Gal 1:18; 2:1-2).* Right from the beginning of the

⁵ St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 11.

Church, Christians saw Peter and his successors as a guarantee of unity in everything, including how to express the teachings of the Gospel that they were passing on.

St Josemaría insisted: “There is no other possible attitude for a Catholic: we have to defend the authority of the Pope always, and to be ready always to correct our own views with docility, in line with the teaching authority of the Church.”⁶ And naturally, this desire to be faithful has to be shown, among other things, “by knowing his thought, which he tells us in Encyclicals or other documents. We have to do our part to help all Catholics pay attention to the teaching of the Holy Father, and bring their everyday behaviour into line with it.”⁷ Accordingly, we will make sure that our unity with Peter’s successor is expressed both in affection and in deeds. We will not only follow his indications and his magisterium intelligently, but we will also try to discover in depth what exactly the Holy Spirit wishes to give the world through him.

Ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia, ibi Deus,⁸ St Josemaría used to say, quoting words of St Ambrose. “We want to be with Peter, because with him is the Church, with him is God; and without him, we don’t find God. That’s why I wanted to romanize the Work. Love the Holy Father very much. Pray a lot for the Pope. Love him very, very much! He needs all the affection of his children.”⁹ An important and necessary part of our apostolate is to bring Christians into unity with the one whom the Holy Spirit has set at the head of the People of God at this specific moment in history. All with Peter to Jesus through Mary! All of us in union with the Pope will bring souls to Jesus through the motherly mediation of Mary. We ask her,

⁶ St Josemaría, *The Forge*, 581.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 633.

⁸ St Ambrose, *In Ps. 40*, 30.

⁹ St Josemaría, Notes taken in a get-together, 11 May 1965.

the Mother of the Church, to gather us round her as she did at Pentecost, and bind all her Son's disciples together as one. We especially ask her for the gift of a heartfelt communion with the Holy Father shown in deeds. For he is the "Sweet Christ on earth," as St Catherine of Siena used to call Peter's successor.

DAY 8

25 JANUARY: THE CONVERSION OF ST PAUL

God's grace converts St Paul

This octave of prayer for the union of Christians concludes with the commemoration of St Paul's conversion. *Saul*, we hear in the first reading of the Mass, *still breathing out threats to murder the Lord's disciples, went to see the High Priest (Acts 9:1-2)*. Paul was a zealous defender of the law of Moses and, from his point of view, the teaching of Christ was a danger to Judaism. Hence he did not hesitate to put all his energy into exterminating the Christian community. He had consented to the death of Stephen and, still not satisfied, *he began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison (Acts 8:3)*.

He goes to Damascus, where the seed of faith has been kindled, with full authority *so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:2)*. But the Lord had different plans for him. When he was close to Damascus *suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?", "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied*. St Paul will never forget this personal encounter with the risen Christ. Many years later, now a tireless witness to the faith, he recalled it again: *Last of all – he writes to the Corinthians – as*

to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am (1 Cor 15:8-10).

Thinking about these scenes, St Josemaría remarked: “What preparation did St Paul have when Christ knocked him off his horse, left him blind and called him to be an apostle? None whatsoever! However, when he responds and says: *Lord, what do you want me to do? (Acts 9:6)*, Jesus chooses him as an apostle.”¹ All his eagerness which had previously led him to persecute Christians, pushes him now – with a new force, greater than he could ever have imagined – to spread faith in Christ to every corner of the earth. Nothing will be capable of separating him from fulfilling his task. His life was marked forever by that encounter on the way to Damascus, which was the beginning of his vocation.

God counts on us as he did with St Paul

We must insistently ask the Holy Spirit for the grace of Christian unity which we anxiously desire. God’s grace, St Augustine reminds us, “is given freely.”² We know that *God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4)*. And we also know that He depends on our collaboration in this, through our life and our words, when we give testimony to the joy that living with Christ brings. In this mission the words of St Paul are always valid, when he asked those around him: *But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? (Rom 10:14-15).*

¹ St Josemaría, Notes taken in a get-together, 9 April 1971.

² St Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 31, 2, 7.

The foundation on which St Paul sustained all his tireless work to spread the Gospel was his personal encounter with Jesus: *Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? (1 Cor 9:1)*. Only by frequently returning to this moment, recalling it on a daily basis, could the Apostle of the Gentiles attract so many people to an encounter with the One who had radically transformed his own life. And it is there, in our own encounter with Christ, that we too will find the impetus to collaborate in reuniting all Christians once again. Pope Benedict XVI, stressing the force that moved St Paul, remarked: “The apostle is not made by himself but is made such by the Lord; consequently the apostle needs to relate constantly to the Lord. Not without reason does Paul say that he is ‘called to be an apostle’.”³

St Josemaría often imagined the circumstances that St Paul lived through: an enormous empire that worshipped false gods and whose way of life was in stark contrast with the lives of those who followed Jesus. At that moment the message of the Gospel was, St Josemaría said, “just the opposite of the general tenor of the times, but St Paul, who knows – who has tasted to the full the joy of belonging to God – launches out, with security in his task of preaching, and does it always, even from prison.”⁴ Conscious that an authentic encounter with Christ can only lead to joy, St Paul explained to the Corinthians the reasons that drove him to evangelise: *Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your joy (2 Cor 1:24)*.

St Paul is a model for attaining holiness

“Learn to pray, learn to seek, learn to ask, learn to call: until

³ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, 10 September 2008.

⁴ St Josemaría, Notes taken in a get-together, 25 August 1968.

you find, until you receive, until it is opened to you.”⁵ The best path for convincing our Lord to confer on his Church the grace of Christian unity, is persevering prayer. St Paul, as soon as he was helped to his feet, went to Damascus, *and for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank (Acts 9:9)*. Only once this time of prayer and penance had finished did God send his servant Ananias: *Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name (Acts 9:15)*.

Conscious that our apostolic work – including the longed-for restoration of Christian unity – does not depend on our own strength, we see that the most important thing is to prepare ourselves adequately to receive God’s graces. Everything that helps us to foster this interior disposition, allowing Christ to unfold his will in our lives, is an eminently apostolic task. Thus we can say that prayer and a spirit of penitence are the main paths to ecumenism: because only Jesus is capable of moving hearts.

Pope Francis once asked: “How do we proclaim this Gospel of reconciliation after centuries of division? Paul himself helps us to find the way. He makes clear that reconciliation in Christ *requires sacrifice*. Jesus gave his life by dying for all. Similarly, ambassadors of reconciliation are called, in his name, to lay down their lives, to live no more for themselves but for Christ who died and was raised for them.”⁶ The conversion of St Paul is a model that directs us towards total unity. The Church, through the example of the Apostle’s life, shows us the way: encounter with Christ, personal conversion, prayer, dialogue, working together.

In the days after the Ascension, Jesus’ disciples *with one accord*

⁵ St Josemaría, Notes taken in a get-together, 25 August 1968.

⁶ Pope Francis, Homily, 25 January 2017.

devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14). Let us trust in the intercession of our Mother so that, as was the case then, we may achieve unity between all Christians: so that one day we are once again reunited, all together, by her side.

