

LIVERPOOL ARCHDIOCESAN CENTRE FOR EVANGELISATION

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Homily preached by Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, at the Two Cathedrals Service. 3.00 pm on the Feast of Pentecost, Sunday 23 May 2010, in Liverpool Anglican Cathedral.

Dear brothers and sisters in our one Lord Jesus Christ.

‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.’ With these words of Saint Paul I greet you all: Christians of different churches, Anglicans, Protestants and Catholics. Our encounter today is like the first Pentecost, when, as the Acts of the Apostles tell us, all were gathered together in one place. And together we are walking on the road of hope.

Yes, Pentecost is the feast of hope. On Pentecost the Spirit came down to the apostles as a storm and tongues of fire. This was the powerful starting point of the one Church of many nations. The Spirit enabled the anxious disciples to go out of the closed doors of the Upper Room, where they were hidden, and to preach publicly and courageously to the crowd the Good News of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. In the beginning there was a rather small community, but with Pentecost and with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit this tiny first community really exploded, three thousand were baptised in one day only. Then in only one generation by the power and the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Church spread throughout the whole then known world from Jerusalem to Rome, from where Roman soldiers probably brought the Christian faith as early as that time to Anglia, today’s England. By the power and the guidance of the Spirit, despite internal weaknesses and harsh external oppressions, calumniations and persecutions, we humbly confess that the Church of Christ lives till today and will until the end of all time.

We also read in the Acts of the Apostles that everybody heard the apostles in their own language. That’s hope again, hope for ecumenism. For ecumenism means in the Greek language the *oikoumene*, that is the whole inhabited world. Indeed, there were gathered in Jerusalem people of the whole then known world: Parthians, Medes and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judaea and Cappadocia, and many others, even travellers from Rome. They were gathered for the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. But when the Holy Spirit came down they all listened to the same message of Jesus Christ and all understood it in their own language. All were amazed, because suddenly the Babylonian confusion and the reciprocal non-understanding among peoples was overcome, all were again united listening to the same message. But this new unity and new universality was not at all a uniformity, it meant unity within diversity and diversity within unity. And what else is the goal of ecumenism today other than this kind of unity within diversity of all believers in Jesus Christ.

Yet when we look at our present situation and become fully aware of our present reality, when we look seriously and honestly at the concrete reality of Christendom in today's world, we must be ashamed. Don't we see a lack of hope and courage, and don't we see everything but unity within diversity? Yes, unfortunately Christians are divided, divided for 1000 years between East and West, between oriental and Western Christianity, and divided for 500 years between Catholics and Protestants, and those who are called Protestants are divided among themselves in hundreds of confessions, in established and free churches, congregations and communities. And the Catholic Church, yes, thanks to God there are no formal breaks of communion, but as we all know there does not exist only unity and love.

This is hardly a Pentecostal reality. This reality, we must say it without hesitation, is against Christ's will, is against the testament he left us on the eve of his death, when he prayed that all be one. It is a reality which contradicts the Pentecostal gift of the one Spirit who wants to unify all the *oikoumene*, all mankind in the belief in the one God, the one Saviour Jesus Christ, the one baptism, the one Spirit and the one hope. This reality of a divided Christendom is sin and is a scandal. It damages the holy task that is the mission given by the Spirit to spread the Gospel all over the world in order to reconcile peoples and to bring them together.

This year we celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the famous missionary conference in Edinburgh. Missionaries from all over the world gathered together and asked themselves: Why are we unable to bring about a renewed Pentecost? What are the main obstacles to spreading the Good News of the Gospel? Their answer was unanimous: The main obstacle was to be seen in the division among Christians. This insight became the starting point of the ecumenical movement of the 20th century, which the Second Vatican Council called an impulse not of the spirit of liberalism but an impulse of the Holy Spirit. So ecumenism is not an end in itself; mission and ecumenism are twins. We cannot preach reconciliation and peace and at the same time be divided and not reconciled among ourselves.

This was true not only one hundred years ago at the beginning of the 20th century, but is even more urgent and true today at the beginning of the 21st century with all the social, cultural, political, military and racial tensions and conflicts in our world. In this situation we as Christians are called to bring anew Pentecostal fire to the world to speak with tongues of fire on unity in the one God of Jesus Christ and on the renewal of our world in the new life of the risen Lord and so to be examples and instruments of reconciliation and peace.

So we should ask the same question the crowd asked Peter on the first Pentecost in Jerusalem: What can we do and what should we do?

Before answering this question let me say this: Much has been done in the last hundred years. We can be grateful to the Spirit who guided us, who inspired and who impelled us. We can be grateful for the work of the World Council of Churches, we can be grateful for the Second Vatican Council and all the work which has been done since. With the help of God's Spirit, we have been able to achieve much more in the last one hundred years than in many hundred years before. There is no reason for disappointment. Today Christians are closer together than ever before. The Spirit helped us to rediscover each other not as enemies, not as strangers or competitors but as Christians, as brothers and sisters in Christ. Today we pray together, we work together, we share daily life and we share it often in mixed

confessional families, in our workplaces, in leisure time events and in many other circumstances.

Today at Pentecost we give thanks that the one Spirit was bestowed upon us, on Catholics, Anglicans and Protestants, and that we are all baptised in the one Spirit, but it should be also today a Spirit of tongues of fire, a Spirit which gives us burning hearts for unity.

Thanks to God and to his mighty Spirit we have no reason to be disillusioned or to speak of an ecumenical winter. Our office has recently published a booklet which has collected and analysed all the dialogues with the main churches of the Reformation. We gave it the title 'Harvesting the Fruits', and it was indeed a rich harvest, much richer than we thought before.

But nevertheless, we have to confess in sadness that there is not yet full communion among us. We are not yet together and not yet united at the one table of the Lord; we cannot yet share the same Eucharistic bread, we cannot yet drink from the one chalice. There are still differences and divisions, divisions which are caused by misunderstandings and unfortunately often by old prejudices or painful memories of the past. But there are also, we cannot deny it, differences of faith, which are rooted in profound convictions of our hearts. We cannot ignore such convictions, we cannot minimize them or water them down. The unity we are seeking is a unity in truth and in love. So we cannot make a potpourri or a mixed salad out of the different churches. We have to recognise and to love each other in our otherness and in our diversity.

Therefore we cannot stop with what we have achieved up to now. Ecumenism is a way, it is a pilgrimage. We have not yet reached our goal. We are still on the way. So again the question arises: What can we and what should we do? What can be the next steps? I would like to answer in four points, four points which are interlinked among themselves.

1. The unity of the Church is not our own work; the unity of the Church ultimately is a gift of the Spirit. We cannot 'make', we cannot organise, we cannot manipulate or enforce it. But we can and we should pray for it. Also Jesus on the eve of his death did not give us a commandment to unite; no, he prayed to his Father that all may be one. Ecumenism means to join Jesus' prayer, means to pray with him and in him. This was the way the conference of Edinburgh became possible. There were already existing prayer-groups everywhere and in all continents, and there were prayer-groups during that conference; in fact, the moderator reflected afterwards that the main thing did not happen in the conference hall but outside the hall, where people were gathered for prayer. Today we have to start again and send a firestorm of prayers to heaven: 'Come, Holy Spirit, come'.

2. We are right when we say that the walls of division do not reach up to heaven; there is more that unites us than what divides us. We have the same Bible as the Word of God and the guide for our life, we are baptised in the one Triune God and bestowed with the same Spirit, we share the same hope in eternal life, we confess the same Apostolic Creed and we celebrate the same feasts, like the feast of Pentecost today. But we have to be honest. This common heritage is today fading and fragile among many Christians. Yet at the same time, unity cannot be built upon semi faith or semi unbelief. Unity must be built upon a solid foundation which withstands the storm of liberalization and secularization and the spreading bushfire of indifferentism and new atheism. So we have to consolidate what we have in common. Why not re-establish Bible groups and Bible sharing, as well as groups of faith formation and faith information for adults, and of ecumenical formation and information in

order to overcome wrong information, old prejudices and religious illiteracy. In such groups we can learn from each other and can enrich ourselves. For ecumenical dialogue does not mean abandoning our own heritage but enriching it through an exchange of gifts, as the late Pope the venerable John Paul II taught us.

3. There is no ecumenism and there cannot be any ecumenism without readiness to *metanoia*, ie, changing our mind and ever more our hearts, there cannot be any ecumenism without profound conversion; conversion not understood as conversion to a different church, but conversion understood in a much more fundamental and original sense as conversion to Jesus Christ, because He is the way, the truth and the life. He is the very goal of ecumenism. Only by being more united with Christ will we be more united also among ourselves, and to the degree we are united with Christ and live in Christ will we be united also among ourselves. There is no cheap ecumenism; ecumenism has its price and requires courageous risks. The ecumenical pilgrimage is a pilgrimage in growing in holiness and sanctification. Spiritual ecumenism is the very heart of the ecumenical movement.

4. Ecumenism is a process of growing together. Every gardener knows that plants do not grow faster by simply pulling the leaves. Growth needs patience. But we grow together also by working together, and there are many fields in which we can cooperate already today, much more than we think and much more than we actually undertake already today. Our world needs the cooperation of all good Christians; it needs that we speak with one voice about human and Christian values, especially about family values which are in so much jeopardy today. Our world also needs our cooperation in the field of culture, peace, social justice and the preservation of creation. Our time particularly needs courage and hope, it must see that not only bad things happen but also good things are possible. So we should give witness that even after a sometimes painful history between the churches reconciliation, cooperation and friendship are possible.

Dear brothers and sisters, Pentecost was the very beginning of such an ecumenical movement. What we need today is a renewed Pentecost; what we need is the fire and storm of the Holy Spirit in our hearts so that we can be patient and impatient at the same time. We need men and women, young people and elderly people with burning hearts to go out and transform the world. The Holy Spirit who was the power of the beginning is promised to us and he is at work also today. There is no reason for despair and disappointment. There is every reason for courage to walk on the road of hope as we do today and as we should do every day. I wish you from all my heart this fire and storm of the Spirit. Let's therefore pray: 'Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.' Amen.

Ends
23 May 2010