

ECUMENISM AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Each year beginning on January 18 and ending on January 25, the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul the Apostle, is designated as Prayer for Christian Unity in the universal calendar of the Catholic Church. This reflects centuries of the Church's commitment to Ecumenism as reiterated at Vatican Council II. The Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) was promulgated on 21 November 1964 and the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*) was issued on 28 October 1965 by the Pope and the Bishops as teachings of our Faith for all to believe. Moreover, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997) clearly speaks of Ecumenism (paragraphs 817, 818, 819, 820, 822, 855, 1271) "Baptism constitutes the foundation of communion among all Christians, including those who are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church: For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church. Indeed, divisions among Christians prevent the Church from realizing in practice the fullness of catholicity proper to her in those of her sons who, though joined to her by Baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her. The ruptures that wound the unity of Christ's Body do not occur without human sin. Serious dissensions appeared and large communities became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church – for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame. However, one cannot charge with the sin of the separation those who at present are born into these communities [that resulted from such separation] and in them are brought up in the faith of Christ, and the Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers. Justified by faith in Baptism, [they] are incorporated into Christ; they have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers in the Lord by the children of the Catholic Church. The Church's mission stimulates efforts towards *Christian unity*. Furthermore, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church: the written Word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope, and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as visible elements. Christ's Spirit uses these Churches and ecclesial communities as means of salvation, whose power derives from the fullness of grace and truth that Christ has entrusted to the Catholic Church. All these blessings come from Christ and lead to him, and are in themselves calls to Catholic unity. Christ always gives his Church the gift of unity, but the Church must always pray and work to maintain, reinforce, and perfect the unity that Christ wills for her. This is why Jesus himself prayed at the hour of his Passion, and does not cease praying to his Father, for the unity of his disciples: That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, ... so that the world may know that you have sent me. The desire to recover the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit. Concern for achieving unity involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. But we must realize that this holy objective – reconciliation of all Christians in the unity of the one and holy Church of Christ – transcends human powers and gifts." Let us encourage, respect and reconcile our traditions!

To promote Ecumenism in our parish, other denominations may give remarks or reflections at Mass from the choir podium, but only after a brief homily is preached from the Ambo by a Catholic priest or deacon. Distance keeps those of other faiths, laity, and Catholic Religious separate from reading the Gospel or substituting a homily when speaking or making appeals.