

# Pope Francis on unity and diversity

Homily during Holy Mass for the Solemnity of Pentecost, 04.06.2017

At 10.30 this morning, *Sunday of Pentecost*, the Holy Father Francis celebrated Holy Mass in St. Peter's Square. Cardinals, bishops and priests concelebrated. During the Eucharistic celebration, after the Gospel reading, the Pope pronounced the following homily:

## Homily of the Holy Father

Today concludes the Easter season, the fifty days that, from Jesus' resurrection to Pentecost, are marked in a particular way by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is in fact the Easter Gift par excellence. He is the Creator Spirit, who constantly brings about new things. Today's readings show us two of those new things. In the first reading, the Spirit makes of the disciples *a new people*; in the Gospel, he creates in the disciples *a new heart*.

*A new people.* On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit came down from heaven, in the form of "divided tongues, as of fire... [that] rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other languages" (*Acts* 2:3-4). This is how the word of God describes the working of the Spirit: first he rests on *each* and then brings *all* of them together in fellowship. To each he gives a gift, and then gathers them all into unity. In other words, the same Spirit creates *diversity and unity*, and in this way forms a new, diverse and unified people: the *universal* Church. First, in a way both creative and unexpected, he generates diversity, for in every age he causes new and varied charisms to blossom. Then he brings about unity: he joins together, gathers and restores harmony: "By his presence and his activity, the Spirit draws into unity spirits that are distinct and separate among themselves" (Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, XI, 11). He does so in a way that effects true union, according to God's will, a union that is not uniformity, but *unity in difference*.

For this to happen, we need to avoid *two* recurrent temptations. The first temptation seeks *diversity without unity*. This happens when we want to separate, when we take sides and form parties, when we adopt rigid and airtight positions, when we become

locked into our own ideas and ways of doing things, perhaps even thinking that we are better than others, or always in the right, when we become so-called "guardians of the truth". When this happens, we choose the part over the whole, belonging to this or that group before belonging to the Church. We become avid supporters for one side, rather than brothers and sisters in the one Spirit. We become Christians of the "right" or the "left", before being on the side of Jesus, unbending guardians of the past or the avant-garde of the future before being humble and grateful children of the Church. The result is diversity without unity. The opposite temptation is that of seeking *unity without diversity*. Here, unity becomes uniformity, where everyone has to do everything together and in the same way, always thinking alike. Unity ends up being homogeneity and no longer freedom. But, as Saint Paul says, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (*2 Cor* 3:17).

So the prayer we make to the Holy Spirit is for the grace to receive *his* unity, a glance that, leaving personal preferences aside, embraces and loves his Church, our Church. It is to accept responsibility for unity among all, to wipe out the gossip that sows the darnel of discord and the poison of envy, since to be men and women of the Church means being men and women of communion. It is also to ask for a heart that feels that the Church is our Mother and our home, an open and welcoming home where the manifold joy of the Holy Spirit is shared.

Now we come to the second new thing brought by the Spirit: *a new heart*. When the risen Jesus first appears to his disciples, he says to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them" (*Jn* 20:22-23). Jesus does not condemn them for having denied and abandoned him during his passion, but instead grants them the spirit

of forgiveness. The Spirit is the first gift of the risen Lord, and is given above all for the forgiveness of sins. Here we see the beginning of the Church, the glue that holds us together, the cement that binds the bricks of the house: *forgiveness*. Because forgiveness is gift to the highest degree; it is the greatest love of all. It preserves unity despite everything, prevents collapse, and consolidates and strengthens. Forgiveness sets our hearts free and enables us to start afresh. Forgiveness gives hope; without forgiveness, the Church is not built up.

ask him: “Spirit of God, Lord, who dwell in my heart and in the heart of the Church, guiding and shaping her in diversity, come! Like water, we need you to live. Come down upon us anew, teach us unity, renew our hearts and teach us to love as you love us, to forgive as you forgive us. Amen”.

The spirit of forgiveness resolves everything in harmony, and leads us to reject every other way: the way of hasty judgement, the cul-de-sac of closing every door, the one-way street criticizing others. Instead, the Spirit bids us take the two-way street of forgiveness received and forgiveness given, of divine mercy that becomes love of neighbour, of charity as “the sole criterion by which everything must be done or not done, changed or not changed” (Isaac of Stella, *Or.* 31). Let us ask for the grace to make more beautiful the countenance of our Mother the Church, letting ourselves be renewed by forgiveness and self-correction. Only then will we be able to correct others in charity.

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The Holy Spirit is the fire of love burning in the Church and in our hearts, even though we often cover him with the ash of our sins. Let us

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**Source:** <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/06/04/170604a.html>

Original language of this text: Italian. Other translations: [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

[Video of the whole Eucharist, June 4, 2017](#) at St Peters square.

On 3 June 2017, Pope Francis emphasised the importance of unity in *reconciled* diversity. See [0427uk](#) on [www.stucom.nl](http://www.stucom.nl).

1 June 2017 Peter Hocken delivered a talk on what Pope Francis teaches about charismatic renewal and ecumenism. See [0429uk](#) on [www.stucom.nl](http://www.stucom.nl), *Catholic Charismatic Renewal: An Ecumenical Current of Grace*.

This homily was given on *4 June, 2017*, in the end of the programme of celebration 50 years Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

The whole programme is to be watched on [www.vocepiu.it/GoldenJubilee](http://www.vocepiu.it/GoldenJubilee) or [www.ccrgoldenjubilee2017.net](http://www.ccrgoldenjubilee2017.net).

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