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## Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2007

### Unity in diversity

#### **Welcome and Presentation**

#### **Prayer: Lord, I pray..**

*Lord, We pray as you have prayed: may we all be one, as the Father is in you and you in him, so that the rest of the world may believe it was the Father who sent you. For this we pray too for the sheep who are not of this fold, that they too will listen to your voice. We pray that the world may come to love you from today onwards. Amen.*

There will be four stages in our reflection this afternoon:

- 1) Diversity in the Church -Yves
- 2) Complementarity: our differences as reasons for unity - Ursula
- 3) Unity is already given in God - Yves
- 4) Our local community as an expression of unity - Ursula

#### **1) Diversity in the Church**

#### **Readings:**

#### **Jn 10:14-16**

*14 I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me,  
15 as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.  
16 And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.*

#### **Jn 14:1b-4**

*1 "Believe in God, believe also in me.  
2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?  
3 And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.  
4 And you know the way where I am going."*

## **Jn 11:49-52**

49 *But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all;*

50 *you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish."*

51 *He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation,*

52 *and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.*

First a very basic acknowledgement: imagine a house with each wall of a different colour. Depending on our point of view, we will say this house is blue, red, yellow or green. Each of us will think he/she is right and the others are wrong. In fact, each will be right, but only partially, and we will all participate in describing different aspects of the same truth. In the same way, religions constitute for me different attempts to describe the indescribable Reality. They, in themselves, do not *possess* this truth, but are the fingers indicating one of the paths towards the truth. Each of them expresses a different sensitivity to this truth, a different point of view, a different interpretation of the same truth. Each of them is a different path, but all paths climb onto the same mountain, because there is only one truth. God uses all possible ways to make himself known to us. The diversity of religions is an expression of the diversity of his infinite ways to reveal himself, according to our differences ( of culture, language, maturity, personality, etc). It is the same for the different Christian confessions: they express different aspects of the same truth which is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. One could say that the three sister confessions (Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism) are linked with the three sister virtues: love, hope and faith. These three virtues are present in each confession, but one these virtues is especially emphasised in one of them. Catholicism could be said to represent love: its sign is the Cross or the crucifix, the sign of incarnated love, God giving his life for mankind. Orthodoxy is hope: its sign is the icon of Resurrection or of Transfiguration, pointing to this hidden Reality behind the appearances. Protestantism is faith, its sign is the Word and the Community as an expression of the Body of Christ and of the presence of God among us. How rich is this diversity! Christ presents himself in thousand different forms. Each form is always a surprise for us. We have to learn to recognise him in these unknown ways. He is the Emmanuel, God among us. Knowledge is not only recognising what we already know, but is a way of discovering also the hitherto unknown. Knowledge is cognition and not only recognition. In fact we are very handicapped when it comes to recognising what is new to us. The diversity of the different perceptions of each confession is certainly a help for the learning process of a new way of cognition.

### **Time of personal recollection:**

Try to remember an encounter with someone so different you wondered at the beginning what you could ever have in common, and yet, where a rich exchange developed. What new learnings resulted?

- Do you know in fact the other parishes in Bega?
- Do you know other social groups than yours?
- Are you ready to open to the unknown which these others can reveal to you?
- How much do you think you have found the way to the truth, and how much does that imply that you do not need others?

We meet here in 20 min.

### **Sharing**

## **2) Complementarity: our differences as reasons for unity**

### **Readings: 1 Co 12:4-30**

#### **1 Co 12:4-30**

*4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;*

*5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;*

*6 and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one.*

*7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

*8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,*

*9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,*

*10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.*

*11 All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*

*12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.*

*13 For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*

*14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many.*

*15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.*

*16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.*

*17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?*

*18 But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose.*

*19 If all were a single organ, where would the body be?*

*20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.*

*21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."*

*22 On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable,*

*23 and those parts of the body which we think less honourable we invest with the greater honour, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty,*

*24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior part,*

*25 that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.*

*26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.*

*27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

*28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues.*

*29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?*

*30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?*

*31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.*

From this reading it is quite clear that it is the Holy Spirit that is the inner source of Christian Unity through the gifts given to the person seeking God. The person is both a witness and an instrument of the mission of the Church according to the measure of Christ's bestowal. God is far beyond any representation we can have of him. However the Church's teaching tries to describe God, He is forever beyond all that can be said. The teaching of the Church is necessary to help us discover or

recognise God. It guides us in deciphering our own experience; and it is this experience within our personal relationship with God that is in fact our real knowledge of God.

The Church is like a community without limits for the sharing of this experience, a community therefore without fences which could exclude anybody. It is an open space with Christ and the Eucharist in its centre. Jesus never excluded anybody. On the contrary, he is in pain for the hundredth sheep, for the lost drachma, for the prodigal son. In the Church, there should be no fences, but only a core, a centre. Someone said once that God is like a circle whose centre is everywhere and the circumference nowhere.

Each of us is unique. Each one of us is an irreplaceable part in the community with something to contribute. Nobody can be excluded, all are needed for the Body of Christ to be complete. The diversity becomes the reason for a new form of unity, grounded in complementarity instead of being based on similarity. In this, spiritual and cultural identities are quite different. The Spirit embraces the whole of Creation. Are we still clinging to our old comfortable “wineskins” of our manmade ways, instead of living in the openness of the Spirit? What one person knows or experienced about God is a treasure that can be communicated to others. We all have some knowledge we can share, and we all are ignorant in various ways. What the other might be ignorant of, is not a reason for excluding him or her; as they may have treasures to bring in areas where we are ignorant, and we can teach each other. Each member becomes a precious actor who enriches and builds up the community. Because our gifts being different, we are not all indiscriminately equal and identical. Rather, we become together a living body where each “organ” has its precious role which contributes to the functioning of the whole. In South America, in Peru, there is a culture - these people are called Aymaras - where couples are chosen in turn as leaders; the aim is not to get the best leaders but to give to each one the opportunity to develop his/her personality and gifts. And the authority is not a person but a couple, already a form of complementarity between masculine and feminine. Rather than seeking comfort in similarities, learning to see differences as complementarity could deeply change our understanding of the Church and show us a way of understanding it as an open living body without limits where everyone has a valuable place.

If we have become divided it is because of our intolerance with each other and our spirit of pride. We have chased away the distinctive sign of faith, which is divine love. Christ said, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another”.

### **Time of personal recollection:**

We will now sit in silence for 5 minutes with the following question: Are there instances we remember where we have allowed ourselves to be directed by grace, rather than by our fears?

We will then break up into pairs, and share with each other something which you treasure in yourself and which you think is special and which you can bring to others, something you have discovered or learned and people could get enriched by. For 20 min.

### **Sharing**

## **3) Unity is already given in God**

### **Reading: Jn 17:21-26**

20 *"I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word,*  
21 *that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

22 *The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,*  
23 *I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.*  
24 *Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world.*  
25 *O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me.*  
26 *I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."*

Despite the fact that there are many descriptions of God, like the Hindu one, the Islamic one, the Christian one...there are not many gods. No, there is only one God and one Reality. God is unique and one. Our unity is already given in God who is the giver of this unity by the fact he is one and creator of all. Unity does not need to be achieved as a negotiation between leaders of the different churches; it is already given and active. We need only to recognise this gift of unity. For the Christian Church, the celebration of the Eucharist is an enactment of this unity. It is a reality which takes shape every time it is celebrated. It does not depend on whether the priest or pastor is good or bad. The mystery happens in any case. Although we need each other in our complementarity, it is also true that the mystery of the Eucharist is complete in each community. God reveals himself fully in the smallest part of a small group of a few believers who gather to celebrate and receive his gifts. The community, as a minute part of the whole, contains the whole and expresses the whole mystery.

We must become an expression of the diversity of the Trinity who remains one in a dance of the three persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This dance is one of the three persons in their move to meet "one another", although they are already one, and in their move to "go out" to reach us, humans, although we are already included and contained in God. This is an eternal move towards unity which is already achieved. God makes himself human so that the human can have part in the experience of the Trinity. The unity of the Trinity is the source of our own unity as a Church, as the body of Christ. The only guardian of this unity is the Holy Spirit. We do not need any other security. It is why, if we do not reflect the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we are not only incomplete but we lack the essential. We can only be true signs of God if we go out of our well known world, out of our comfort zone, out even of the well known field of our faith, in order to open to the other, to the one who is different, unknown, poor, marginal, rejected, aboriginal, or anyone we exclude usually. Our Church can only be a true sign of God if we are open and welcoming, if we are signs of love, if we go out in a desperate attempt to open ourselves to the other, to embrace the whole creation. But, most of the time, we are not opening but remain enclosed in our community, refusing to see that we need to break out of this comfortable "I know you, you know me, because we are similar". "Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me". The world does not believe; certainly because we are not one. It is more than a tragedy.

### **Time of personal recollection:**

Let's have a time of silence together to contemplate this dance of the Holy Trinity: the Being we have through the Father; the Light that is poured into our hearts through the Son, and the Love of the Holy Spirit that brings life, and hear what it can teach us. What does this unity in God tell us, so that the world may believe? Listen to the voice of your heart, that deepest place where God dwells within you. Listen to the feelings that the reflection arouses in you. For 15 min.

### **Sharing**

#### **4) Our local community as an expression of unity**

##### **Readings: Mt 18:18-20**

*18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

*19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.*

*20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

##### **Vassula Ryden**

*There were so many moments of joy to see Orthodox, Lutherans, Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, etc. praying together the rosary, all near each other and not withdrawn because this prayer supposedly is prayed only by the Roman Catholics. On the contrary, we made no differences. The prayer of the Rosary linked us together, and the exposed Blessed Sacrament for adoration, even more, for in front of our Lord we kneeled and felt in this oneness that we were indeed the sons and the daughters of the Most High because everyone was moved by the Spirit. (Rm 8, 14), and like children belonging to one family, together, side-by-side we were one and not one against the other, for the spirit of differentiation was not among us anymore. In these moments we realised that we were living by grace and not by law. (Rm 6, 141). Our hearts were bound together and in Christ's presence we felt truly united in the spirit and in God's love. Indeed, in these moments we had one mind and one heart all united in Christ's Heart.*

*We all say, "Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven". Well then, what is holding the officials of the Church back to do the Will of God and declare their reconciliation if already the laity and priests around the world are living a unity? Unity began yesterday, we saw it... we lived it... we rejoiced in it, and we want it as much as the Holy Spirit wants it. Jesus Christ united us together by his Blood, so how can one deny this unity? "He is the peace between us, and has made the Gentile and the Jew into one and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart, actual destroying in his own person the hostility caused by the rules and decrees of the Law" (Ep 2, 14-15). How can we say "no" to God, if he wants us to unite? Could it be because our hearts have hardened? Have we forgotten the Holy Father's words when he said: "The elements that unite us are far greater than those that divide us"? So we should take up those elements and use them to smoothen up the way to a complete unity.*

We are a living body. Our local community is the visible aspect of the incarnation of the body of Christ. The Church is for us, as may be for non believers as well, the window into this deeper Reality. In the early times, the Christian community was a passionate one. They shared everything they had. They lived a common life. They prayed every day together. God was the core of their life, and everything had to do with the search and the practice of his love. Why are we not more passionate today? What did we lose? Why are we so lukewarm? We believe in God, we love him and we are good people, but we continue to live like most people do. Why does our faith not change us radically as well as the way we live, our relationships with others, our sense of community? We are called to become this open body which not only does not exclude anybody, but which embraces the whole creation, ready to share deeply, opening and giving itself to the other, the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the marginal and the rejected. It is not the institution which is the warrant of the unity, but the Holy Spirit who guides us towards the true Reality. We are all participants. We have the power to bind and to loosen; we loosen from sin and bind to God every time we can love with this open acceptance of what is given. What do we do with this powerful gift? How do we concretely give shape to this body of Christ which lives out of another logic than the one of the world? How do we

enact unity, so that it is visible and that the world can believe? Our Church is not just our parish but it is the whole of Bega Valley, and more even. It has to remain an open space for all. How do we achieve this? What has to change in us: in the way we believe, in the way we think, in the way we look at our reality, in the way we listen, in the way we act? “We have to knock down the old bricks inside our hearts, bricks of intolerance, pride, lack of forgiveness, unfaithfulness, disunion, lack of love, and reconstruct Christ’s Church inside our hearts by acknowledging each other in our hearts, allowing God to be more in us to bring us his Peace.” What is the Unity we seek? What can we decide and start with here, today?

**Finish: Prayer of Intercession**