



# The Holy See

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**MEETING OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
WITH THE ANGLICAN COMMUNITY  
GATHERED IN THE CHURCH OF "ALL SAINTS" IN ROME**

*Sunday, 26 February 2017*

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**HOMILY**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I wish to thank you for your gracious invitation to celebrate this parish anniversary with you. More than two hundred years have passed since the first public Anglican liturgy was held in Rome for a group of English residents in this part of the city. A great deal has changed in Rome and in the world since then. In the course of these two centuries, much has also changed between Anglicans and Catholics, who in the past viewed each other with suspicion and hostility. Today, with gratitude to God, we recognize one another as we truly are: brothers and sisters in Christ, through our common baptism. As friends and pilgrims we wish to walk the path together, to follow our Lord Jesus Christ together.

You have invited me to bless the new icon of Christ the Saviour. Christ looks at us, and his gaze upon us is one of salvation, of love and compassion. It is the same merciful gaze which pierced the hearts of the Apostles, who left the past behind and began a journey of new life, in order to follow and proclaim the Lord. In this sacred image, as Jesus looks upon us, he seems also to call out to us, to make an appeal to us: "Are you ready to leave everything from your past for me? Do *you* want to make my love known, my mercy?"

His gaze of divine mercy is the source of the whole Christian ministry. The Apostle Paul says this to us, through his words to the Corinthians which we have just heard. He writes: "Having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart" (2 Cor 4:1). Our ministry flows forth from the mercy of God, which sustains our ministry and prevents it losing its vigour.

Saint Paul did not always have an easy relationship with the community at Corinth, as his letters show. There was also a painful visit to this community, with heated words exchanged in writing. But this passage shows Paul overcoming past differences. By living his ministry in the light of mercy received, he does not give up in the face of divisions, but devotes himself to reconciliation. When we, the community of baptized Christians, find ourselves confronted with disagreements and turn towards the merciful face of Christ to overcome it, it is reassuring to know that we are doing as Saint Paul did in one of the very first Christian communities.

How does Saint Paul grapple with this task, where does he begin? With humility, which is not only a beautiful virtue, but *a question of identity*. Paul sees himself as a servant, proclaiming not himself but Christ Jesus the Lord (v. 5). And he carries out this service, this ministry according to the mercy shown him (v. 1): not on the basis of his ability, nor by relying on his own strength, but by trusting that God is watching over him and sustaining his weakness with mercy. Becoming humble means drawing attention away from oneself, recognizing one's dependence on God as a beggar of mercy: this is the starting point so that God may work in us. A past president of the World Council of Churches described Christian evangelization as "a beggar telling another beggar where he can find bread". I believe Saint Paul would approve. He grasped the fact that he was "fed by mercy" and that his priority was to share his bread with others: the joy of being loved by the Lord, and of loving him.

This is our most precious good, our treasure, and it is in this context that Paul introduces one of his most famous images, one we can all apply to ourselves: "we have this treasure in earthen vessels" (v. 7). We are but earthen vessels, yet we keep within us the greatest treasure in the world. The Corinthians knew well that it was foolish to preserve something precious in earthen vessels, which were inexpensive but cracked easily. Keeping something valuable in them meant running the risk of losing it. Paul, a graced sinner, humbly recognized that he was fragile, just like an earthen vessel. But he experienced and knew that it was precisely there that human misery opens itself to God's merciful action; the Lord performs wonders. That is how the "extraordinary power" of God works (v. 7).

Trusting in this humble power, Paul serves the Gospel. Speaking of some of his adversaries in Corinth, he calls them "super apostles" (2 Cor 12:11), perhaps, and with a certain irony, because they had criticized him for his weaknesses even as they considered themselves observant, even perfect. Paul, on the other hand, teaches that only in realizing we are weak earthen vessels, sinners always in need of mercy, can the treasure of God be poured into us and through us upon others. Otherwise, we will merely be full of our treasures, which are corrupted and spoiled in seemingly beautiful vessels. If we recognize our weakness and ask for forgiveness, then the healing mercy of God will shine in us and will be visible to those outside; others will notice in some way, through us, the gentle beauty of Christ's face.

At a certain point, perhaps in the most difficult moment with the community in Corinth, the Apostle

Paul cancelled a visit he had planned to make there, also foregoing the offerings he would have received from them (2 Cor 1:15-24). Though tensions existed in their fellowship, these did not have the final word. The relationship was restored and Paul received the offering for the care of the Church in Jerusalem. The Christians in Corinth once again took up their work, together with the other communities which Paul visited, to sustain those in need. This is a powerful sign of renewed communion. The work that your community is carrying out together with other English-speaking communities here in Rome can be viewed in this light. True, solid communion grows and is built up when people work together for those in need. Through a united witness to charity, the merciful face of Jesus is made visible in our city.

As Catholics and Anglicans, we are humbly grateful that, after centuries of mutual mistrust, we are now able to recognize that the fruitful grace of Christ is at work also in others. We thank the Lord that among Christians the desire has grown for greater closeness, which is manifested in our praying together and in our common witness to the Gospel, above all in our various forms of service. At times, progress on our journey towards full communion may seem slow and uncertain, but today we can be encouraged by our gathering. For the first time, a Bishop of Rome is visiting your community. It is a grace and also a responsibility: the responsibility of strengthening our ties, to the praise of Christ, in service of the Gospel and of this city.

Let us encourage one another to become ever more faithful disciples of Jesus, always more liberated from our respective prejudices from the past and ever more desirous to pray for and with others. A good sign of this desire is the “twinning” taking place today between your parish of All Saints and All Saints Catholic parish. May the saints of every Christian confession, fully united in the Jerusalem above, open for us here below the way to all the possible paths of a fraternal and shared Christian journey. Where we are united in the name of Jesus, he is there (cf. Mt 18:20), and turning his merciful gaze towards us, he calls us to devote ourselves fully in the cause of unity and love. May the face of God shine upon you, your families and this entire community!

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### **Questions and answers**

*On entering our Church during services, many people are surprised because “it really looks like a Catholic Church”. Many Catholics have heard of Henry VIII but they are unaware of Anglican traditions and of the ecumenical progress of the last 50 years. What would you like to say to them about the relationship between Catholics and Anglicans today?*

It is true. The relationship between Catholics and Anglicans today is good. We love each other as brothers and sisters! It is true that there are many bad things in history, and “tearing a page” out of history and keeping it as if it were an “icon” of [our] relationship is unfair. A historical fact must be seen in the hermeneutics of that time, not in another hermeneutical context. I have said that today’s relations are good. And they have progressed even further since the visit of the Primate,

Michael Ramsey. But, also regarding saints, we also share a tradition regarding saints, a fact your parson wished to stress. Never, ever have the two Churches, the two Traditions, denied the saints, as Christians experienced bearing witness up to that point. And this is important. But there were also brotherly relations in times of conflict, difficult times, when political, economic and religious powers were all mixed up. However, the rule, "*cuius regio, eius religio*" existed. But, even in those times, there were some relations....

I met an elderly Jesuit in Argentina, an old man. I was young; he was old: Fr Guillermo Furlong Cardiff was born in the city of Rosario to an English family. As a boy he was an altar server — he was Catholic, from an English Catholic family. He served as an altar boy in Rosario's Anglican Church during Queen Victoria's funeral service. Even in those times, there was this relationship. And the relations between Catholics and Anglicans are — I don't know if, historically, one can say this but it is an image that will help us to reflect — two steps forward, half a step back, two steps forward, half a step back.... It is so. It is human. And we must continue in this manner.

There is another thing which has kept the link between our religious Traditions strong: the monks and the monasteries. And the monks, both Anglican and Catholic, are a great spiritual force in our Traditions.

And our relations, as I may tell you, have improved even further. I am pleased; this is a good thing. 'But we do not do everything in the same way...'. But we walk together, journey together. For the time being, this is fine. Each day brings its worries. I don't know. This is what comes to mind to say to you. Thank you.

*Your Predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, warned against the risk, in ecumenical dialogue, of giving priority to cooperation in social initiatives rather than following the more demanding path of theological agreement. It appears that you prefer the contrary, that is, to "walk and work" together in order to reach the goal of Christian unity. Is this true?*

I do not know the context in which Pope Benedict said this. I don't know, and so it is a little difficult for me. I cannot really answer this.... Whether he meant to say this or not?... Perhaps it was during a conversation with theologians.... But I am sure that both aspects are important. This is certain. Which of the two has priority?... And on the other hand, Patriarch Athenagoras' famous comment — which is true because I asked Patriarch Bartholomew and he said: "This is true" — when he said to Blessed Pope Paul VI: "Let us make unity together and leave the theologians on an island to think about it". It was a joke, but historically, it is accurate. I had doubts but Patriarch Bartholomew told me that it was true.

But what is the heart of the matter, because I believe that what Pope Benedict said is true: we must seek a theological dialogue in order to also seek the roots ... of the Sacraments ... of many issues on which we are still not in agreement. But this cannot be done in a laboratory: it must be

done as we advance, along the way. We are on a journey, and as we journey, we also have these discussions. Theologians do this. But in the meantime, we help each other, we, one with the other, with our needs, in our lives; also spiritually we help each other. For example, in the 'twinning' [of the parishes] there was the fact of studying Scripture together, and we help each other in our charitable service, in service to the poor, in hospitals, in wars.... It is very important. This is very important. It is not possible to have ecumenical dialogue while standing still. No. Ecumenical dialogue is carried out as we walk, because ecumenical dialogue is a journey, and theological matters are discussed along the way. I believe this betrays neither the thought of Pope Benedict, nor the reality of ecumenical dialogue. This is my interpretation. If I knew the context in which that thought was expressed, I might say something different, but this is what comes to mind to say.

*The Church of All Saints began with a group of British faithful, but is now an international congregation with people from various countries. In several regions of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, ecumenical relations between the Churches are better and more creative than here in Europe. What can we learn from the example of the Churches from the southern part of the world?*

Thank you. It is true. The young Churches have a different vitality, because they are young. They are searching for a different means of expression. For example, a liturgy here in Rome, or consider London or Paris, is not the same as a liturgy in your country, where the liturgical ceremony, also Catholic, is expressed with joy, with dance and many diverse forms belonging to those young Churches. Young Churches have more creativity. And in the beginning it was the same here in Europe too: they were searching.... When you read, for example in the *Didache*, how the Eucharist, the encounter among Christians, was celebrated, there was great creativity. Then as she grew, the Church become more consolidated, she matured into adulthood.

But young Churches have more vitality and they also have a need to cooperate, a considerable need. For example, I am studying, my collaborators are studying the possibility of a journey to South Sudan. Why? Because the Anglican, Presbyterian and Catholic Bishops, all three, came together to tell me: "Please, come to South Sudan, just for one day, but do not come alone: come with Justin Welby, that is, with the Archbishop of Canterbury. This creativity came from them, the young Church. We are considering whether it can be done, whether the situation is too dangerous down there.... But we must do it because the three of them, together, want peace, and they are working together for peace...."

There is a very interesting anecdote. When Blessed Paul VI beatified the Martyrs of Uganda — a young Church — among the martyrs, who were all young catechists, several were Catholic and others Anglican, and they were all martyred by the same king, in hatred of the faith, and because they did not want to follow the king's corrupt propositions. And Paul VI felt embarrassed, because he said: "I must beatify one and all; they are martyrs, one and all". But at that moment in the Catholic Church, it was not quite possible to do this. The Council had just taken place.... But today that young Church celebrates one and all together; Paul VI too, in the homily, in the discourse, in

the beatification Mass, wanted to designate the Anglican martyrs of the faith at the same level as the Catholic catechists. This is what a young Church does. Young Churches have courage, because they are young. Like all young people, they have more courage than we, the not-so-young!

And then, my experience. I was a close friend of the Anglicans in Buenos Aires, because the back of the parish of Merced was adjacent to the Anglican cathedral. I was a close friend of Bishop Gregory Venables, a very good friend. But there is another experience: in northern Argentina there are Anglican missions with aborigines and Catholic missions with aborigines, and the Anglican Bishop and the Catholic Bishop work there together, and teach. When the people cannot go to the Catholic celebration on Sunday, they go to the Anglican celebration, and the Anglicans go to the Catholic one, because they do not want a Sunday to go by without a celebration. They work together. And here the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith knows this. And they do charity together. The two Bishops are friends and the two communities are friends.

I think this is a richness that our young Churches can bring to Europe and to the Churches that have a great tradition. They give us the soundness of a very well-developed and well-thought-out tradition. Ecumenism is easier, it is true, in the young Churches. It is true. But I think that — I'm going back to the second question — ecumenism in a more mature Church, more mature in research, is perhaps more sound in theological research, in the study of history, of theology, of the liturgy, as is the Church in Europe. And I think it would do us well, both Churches: to send some seminarians from here, from Europe, to gain pastoral experience in the young Churches; they learn a great deal. They come from the young Churches to study in Rome, at least the Catholics, we know that. But to send them to see, to learn from the young Churches would be a great richness in the sense that you have said. Ecumenism is easier there; it is easier, something which does not mean more superficial, no; it is not superficial. They do not negotiate the faith and identity. That aborigine tells you in northern Argentina: "I am Anglican". But [if] the bishop is not there, the parson is not there, the reverend is not there.... "I want to praise God on Sunday and I go to the Catholic cathedral", and vice versa. This is the richness of young Churches. I don't know, this is what comes to mind to say to you.