

## ARCHBISHOP RUNCIE'S HOMILY AT ALL SAINTS' ANGLICAN CHURCH

October 1, 1989

*On October 1, Archbishop Runcie, before attending the Pope's Mass in St Peter's Square, presided at the celebration of the Eucharist in the Anglican Church of All Saints in Via del Babuino. The following is the text of his homily on that occasion:*

*Text:* Be kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (*Eph 4.28*).

One hundred and ten years ago John Henry Newman came to Rome to receive a cardinal's hat. Until an hour or so before leaving England he was writing letters in a desperate bid to clear his desk. I know how he felt. One letter from a close friend on the nature of the search for religious truth drew from the harried Newman this observation:

Men must have *chronic familiarity* to understand each other, for truth slowly sinks into the mind...

I am the fourth Archbishop of Canterbury in succession to visit His Holiness the Pope in Rome. In our modern use of the word, I don't think that makes the Archbishop of Canterbury's familiarity here "chronic". Yet I believe our regular meetings do illustrate the wisdom of Newman's words. The bonds of familiarity now established between Anglicanism and the Catholic Church are too firm for old hostilities and past misunderstandings to arise again. We have glimpsed the beauty of God's truth alive in each other. That truth sinks slowly into the mind. But, having done so, it stays.

This familiarity of Popes and Archbishops is echoed in many other friendships. Here, at All Saints, Bevan Wardrobe and Don Alfredo Bona have shown that Anglican and Roman Catholic parish priests can work in partnership in Italy just as they do increasingly in England and elsewhere. And amidst us here today I am delighted to welcome Father Pierre Duprey, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and a member of ARCIC, whose familiarity is close and delightful.

In that same letter of Newman's, he said:

"Paper argument is most disappointing".

I must be careful not to endorse that too enthusiastically in the presence of the Co-Chairmen of ARCIC, but I believe I know what Newman meant. Few were more addicted to paper argument than he, but few have realised more clearly that truth is discovered most frequently in sacrament and holiness of life.

Like Newman, St. Paul was equally addicted to paper argument, but equally dismissive of its usefulness as a final arbiter of truth. For him the learning of Christ was seen in putting off "the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful

lusts" and putting on the new man "which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness". That holiness would be revealed when "bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking" were put away. It would be shown when the Holy Spirit working in Christ's people made them "kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another".

The spirit of familiarity is expressed in this sacrament of unity. Here in the Eucharist Christians experience God's saving grace at a level too deep for the adequacy of words. Yet our liturgists have been busy trying to help the faithful understand the action of the Eucharist more clearly. A new familiarity — perhaps most marked in the sharing of the peace — identifies the contemporary liturgies of both our churches. Yet the Eucharist is not so much to be understood as to be experienced; not so much to be explained as something in which to partake; it is to feed us rather than to teach us. That is one of the reasons why the majestic, even if sometimes obscure, liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer which we use today retains such affection.

For Christians comprehend what they cannot always be said to understand. Most Christians have little understanding of eucharistic theology, yet they comprehend the Eucharist. We need to remember that things which are completely plain and explicit may be of only limited spiritual sustenance. In the liturgy and in the Scriptures we enter upon holy ground, we approach a mystery.

Karl Rahner has reminded us that the vast majority of Christians, whether Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Lutherans or of any other tradition, are members of their particular church for historical, geographical or sociological reasons; only a minority are so on theological or confessional grounds. Their faith is not fundamentally concerned with confessional questions. They recognize that their fellow Christians of other traditions share the same hope, rejoice in the same salvation, and follow the same Lord. Despite our confessional differences, we do enjoy this deeper unity. The same Spirit cries out without words to the same Father in our hearts (*Rom 8.15*). "In the Spirit of God all of us 'know' something more simple, more true and more real that we can express at the level of our theological concepts". Thus speaks Karl Rahner, as he explores this mystery. "God's love has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit". So says St. Paul to the Church in this city. That, twenty centuries on, remains the true basis of our unity.

The living Christ through his Spirit in the world has created a fellowship of those who, believing in the same gospel and sharing the same baptism, find a grace of unity in their common salvation. Their great desire is to share together in this sacra-

ment of unity, the Eucharist, and to obey the Lord's command, "Do this in remembrance of me".

That's why we must never take our separation for granted. That's why we should never allow our divisions to become tolerable, or worse still, comfortable. We should ever recognize the scandal that Anglicans and Roman Catholics must celebrate two Eucharists to make one memorial of our redemption on the day of the Lord.

Yet, in a few moments time, after celebrating this Eucharist, I will go to St. Peter's to attend the Sunday Eucharist offered by the Bishop of Rome. At this Anglican Eucharist in All Saints we are reminded of the Communion of Saints, the example of grace filled lives and their continuing ministry of intercession for the living. At the St. Peter's mass Pope John Paul II will officially recognize a number of Christian women and men as "blessed". God's redemptive and sanctifying grace continues to transform human beings into the image of Christ. In the Communion of all the saints, there will be no denominations. The walls of our division do not reach as high as heaven.

Holiness of life knows no denominational barriers. Sanctity is recognised by Christians wherever it is found — whether in Popes or in peasants, in martyrs of our own day, such as the Catholic Archbishop Oscar Romero, or the Anglican Archbishop, Janani Luwum, and in the unknown lives of the faithful of all our churches who make up the body of Christ on earth.

The saints break through these barriers

because of their firm grasp of the fact of heaven. The dedication of this church to all the saints was a mark of perhaps unconscious ecumenical prophecy a century ago. For the saints teach us that heaven is the final and lasting attainment of communion with God, that it is eternal, as God himself is eternal. They teach us that, though our present work is limited in time and space, our calling is to eternity, not to a lonely eternity, but to a social eternity in which God is the centre and the life and the bond of the vast company of his redeemed. In the eternal city of Rome they remind us that the perfect city we desire is in heaven, because only in heaven can its conditions be satisfied.

Fourteen hundred years ago there lived a Christian in this country whose name is unknown to us. We know little about him save that he wrote some fine Latin prayers. But we may rightly think of him as one of the myriad anonymous holy ones who draw our eyes heavenward to that unity in eternity to which our Lord calls us. Out of his longing to attain the heavenly country he wrote a prayer which we might entitle a "collect for pilgrims upon the saints highway":

Almighty and most merciful God, unto whose eternal blessedness we ascend, not by quickness of the flesh, but by readiness of the spirit; by thy holy inspiration make us to seek always the courts of thy heavenly city, and of thy gracious goodness and mercy bring us confidently to enter therein; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.