

**SERMON FOR MASS ON 28 MAY 2006 AT THE
PARISH OF SAINT-NICOLAS DE FLÜE (FIRST COMMUNION MASS)
1 CORINTHIANS 11, 23-26 and JOHN 17, 11-19
PASTEUR JEAN-BAPTISTE LIPP**

Brothers and Sisters,

What family doesn't have these days a parent, a grandparent, an uncle or an aunt, a brother or a sister-in-law, or some relation who belongs to another Christian tradition? And even, as Father has mentioned at the beginning of the Mass, somebody who might come from another religion ... Here in Switzerland we are more and more mixed. So we are called to take part in celebrations which we are not used to, celebrations where things are done a bit differently from in our own church: baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals ... Today, it is a first Communion. So I would like to thank your priest and your parish for the welcome given to the Pastor of Belmont-Lutry, myself. We share in part the same geographical area.

There still remain differences between Catholics and Protestants, of course. But as Cardinal Walter Kasper, who is responsible in the Roman Catholic Church for ecumenical relations, 'what unites us is so much more important than what still divides us.' Our churches put different - and sometimes divergent - emphases on the same treasures of the same Christian faith. For example, the Eucharist, so dear to those of Catholic faith, and the Bible, so dear to Protestants. Which of the two is more important?

Three years ago, Pope John Paul II wrote a fine encyclical entitled *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, that is 'The Church draws her life from the Eucharist'. If Protestants had a Pope, and if he had written an encyclical, he would probably have published it with the title 'The Church draws its life from the Word' (*Ecclesia de Verbo*). So, which is it? When we are being Church, where do we draw our life from: from the Eucharist or from the Word? From both, my friends!

Christians of all traditions draw life both from Communion and from the Bible. The Church takes its life from Christ, who gives himself us in his Word as well as in the sacrament of Communion. Listen, did you notice that the two Bible readings this morning complement each other perfectly on this subject? St Paul announces a tradition which comes from the Lord: Communion. St John – whose gospel does not contain the words which instituted the Eucharist! – speaks of the last prayer of Jesus that his followers might all be one, and says in particular: 'I have given them the gift of your Word.'

The Word for St John even has a eucharistic sense, since Jesus asks the Father that the disciples might have joy. This is the meaning of the Eucharist: to give thanks joyfully. Our churches draw their life from Christ. He has spoken to us, and he still speaks to us, through the Bible. He gave himself for us and he still gives himself for us, through Communion. And he cannot be torn apart, only share himself among us. Communion should therefore both be the source and the summit of our unity.

Unity is given, through Communion, on four levels. I have already spoken of the ecumenical level of the unity which is possible and longed for among Christians who live by the same gift. I would like to speak of three more: unity with God, unity with oneself and unity with the world.

- Communion is a profound exchange between God and Man. When we communicate, it is like a dialogue, God says something to us and we say something to him. Listen to this theological reflection by someone from the past: *'All that is of Jesus Christ we can call our own, and all that is ours we can name as from Jesus Christ ... It is the exchange which, through his divine goodness, he wanted to have with us: that by taking to himself our poverty, he has given us his riches ... by taking to himself our mortality, he has given us his immortality; by coming to earth, he has made for us a way to heaven; by being the Son of God, he has made us children of God.'* This beautiful confession of faith about Communion could perfectly well have been said by St Nicolas de Flüe. The patron saint of your parish was well aware of this spirituality of the exchange between the life of God and life of mankind. Well, it was written by the Geneva reformer, John Calvin! With him, with Nicolas, with the universal Church, I believe that Communion is a mysterious exchange between God and myself.
- Communion is also a union with oneself. We are all pilgrims on this earth. Now there is during this pilgrimage, from our first Communion till our last, something like a red line, which is the line of the footprints of God in our lives. From Communion to Communion, we are moving forward. And we prayed a little while ago that our Communion should be frequent. Through all the stages and ages of our lives. This is the faithfulness of God who declares himself and gives himself to us. Until the end. Let me tell you how moving it is for me to share communion every three months with Albertine, one of my parishioners who will soon be 100 years old ...
- Finally, Communion is a union with the world which is hungry. Hungry for bread and hungry for God. There is a story of a child in Latin America who, after receiving Communion in his parish church, went back to the altar to receive Communion again on the same day!! When the priest told him that he had already received Communion, he replied 'But I was hungry!' Communion commits us to refuse to separate the Church from the hungry world. Our world is spiritually hungry, certainly, but also materially hungry. And Christ wants all our hunger to be satisfied.

May he come to satisfy our ecumenical hunger
and also our economic hunger!

May he come to quench our psychological thirst
as well as our spiritual thirst !

Amen

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