

## **UNIT 5**

### **FILLING THE WATER JARS** **TOGETHER IN JOY AS SERVANTS OF UNITY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

*“On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee .... When the wine gave out the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine’ .... And Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come’. His mother said to the servants ‘Do whatever he tells you’ ....Jesus said to them, ‘Fill the jars with water’. And they filled them to the brim”. (John 2.1/7).*

#### **OPENING PRAYER**

Lord Jesus, who, on the eve of your death,  
prayed that all your disciples might be one,  
as you in the Father and the Father in you,  
make us feel intense sorrow over the infidelity of our disunity.  
Give us the honesty to recognize  
and the courage to reject  
whatever indifference towards one another or mutual distrust  
or even enmity lie hidden within us.  
Enable us to meet one another in you.  
and let your prayer for the unity of Christians  
be ever in our hearts and on our lips,  
unity such as you desire and by the means that you will.  
Make us find the way that leads to unity  
in you who are perfect charity,  
through being obedient to the spirit of love and truth.  
Amen. (Fr Paul Couturier)

Question: What struck you most in Unit 4?

#### **THEME**

#### **TOGETHER IN JOY AS SERVANTS OF UNITY**

Unity pilgrims see an image of themselves in the servants who filled the water jars at the marriage feast in Cana. As they do what lies in their power to prepare for the day on which all may share in a common Eucharist, they too are filling the water jars. They know that the reconciliation of the Churches is a long and daunting journey. But the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

So, as joyful servants of unity, thinking big and acting small, they plant and cultivate seeds of new relationships between local congregations of the Church. Only God can bring about the miracle of unity for which Jesus prays. In these ways of being together unity pilgrims herald that miracle:

## **1. Together in the Word**

*“The Word became flesh, and lived among us, and we saw his glory”* (John 1.14).  
*“The Bible led to our separation, and it is by means of the Bible that we must once again become one”* (Cardinal Walter Kasper in **Sacrament of Unity** p.69).

In his goodbye to the elders of the Church of Miletus St Paul said:  
*“I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace that has power to build you up”* (Acts 20:32).

Fr Brendan Leahy comments: *“Paul didn’t say “I am leaving you with the Word” but rather “I commend you to the Word”. It is Paul’s inheritance. The Word has power to give a new mentality, to free us and to build community. There’s always a need to discover new ways to live the Word together. And new ways to share how it has impacted on us and built up the community. Christians can admire other valid initiatives and projects to build community but they believe it is above all the Word lived and shared together that has the power to guide, reconcile and transform”*.

## **2. Together in Communion**

*“Jesus said: ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them’* (John 14.23).

Being together in communion we no longer learn our catechism against one another in a polemical way but we help one another to be more fully surrendered to God the Holy Trinity. We embark on a humble sharing of our gifts and a grateful receiving of the gifts of others.

Being together in communion we are able to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Body of Christ, to share in their joys and in their sufferings and to offer them deep and genuine friendship.

Being together in communion brings the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God. And we see this gift as not only for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a ‘gift for me’.

In this spirit the International Catholic/Methodist Theological Commission makes groundbreaking proposals in *“The Grace given you in Christ”* published in 2006.

Being together in communion means we know how to make room for our brothers and sisters, bearing each other’s burdens (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy .

Being together in communion is the Invisible Monastery of Christian Unity which, on Jan. 25th 2008, Pope Benedict XVI invited all to join, describing it as *“that immense community of Christians of all traditions who, without noise or fuss, pray and offer their lives that unity may be achieved”*

### **3. Together in Waiting**

*“The heart of Spiritual Ecumenism is to allow Jesus to pray in us for unity. What is needed is a torrent of prayer from the whole Christian world”* (Fr Paul Couturier). This is a prayer of silent yearning shared by all for the renewal of the Church in a new Pentecost.

A letter from Fr Paul Couturier to her Cistercian monastery, at Grottaferrata, Rome, inspired Blessed Maria Gabriella of Unity (1915 – 1939) to offer her life for the unity of Christians. When she died on Good Shepherd Sunday 1939 the pages of her Bible which carried the prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper *“Father, may they all be one”* (John 17) were found to be worn away by daily use.

Blessed Maria Gabriella is sister and friend of all who commit themselves to the *“Invisible Monastery”* of prayer that the whole Church may be united in serving God’s reconciling will for the whole world. On Jan. 25<sup>th</sup> 1983 Pope John Paul 2 beatified her, calling her life *“a sign from God”* to the Church and a model of *“the spiritual ecumenism which is the soul of the ecumenical movement”*.

*“The souls that pray know in detail neither when nor how these things (i.e. the visible unity of the Church) will come about. But this troubles them very little, for they have boundless trust in Christ. They only know that all that he does will be both good and perfect. Their only care is to lift off the Christian multitude the great stone of disunity which holds back Our Lord from manifesting himself to the world in the glory of his visible Unity”* (Fr Paul Couturier)

*“Woe betide us if we forget that the whole identity of the Church lies in that everlasting act of self-giving on the part of the everlasting Word to the everlasting Source, the Son to the Father.....When this extraordinary eternal movement of God to God becomes manifest in the human world it is attractive. It draws the attention, the aspiration, the amazement, and the delight of human beings.....the action of God made brightly manifest in the middle of our human confusions, so that people say, ‘That is the journey I want to go’, Jesus’ journey into the heart of the Father who is his Source”*. Archbishop Rowan Williams at St Alban’s May 17<sup>th</sup> 2003.

### **4. Together on Sunday**

Together on Sunday is the distinctive initiative of the unity pilgrims. On the Lord’s Day they take part in the worship of their own Church and also join in the worship of the congregation of another Church. They arrange their pilgrim visits to the other congregations at appropriate times in consultation with their leaders. They go in friendship and faith as representatives of their own local congregation.

“Together on Sunday” is both simple and profound. For Catholics it responds to the Vatican II decree on ecumenism *“Unitatis Redintegratio”* which exhorts them to take the initiative in reaching out to other Churches. Every place where God’s people

worship is sacred. Unity pilgrims are privileged to encounter the living God in sacred places other than their own.

The pilgrimages do not in any way lessen the pilgrims' commitment as members of their own Church. Catholic unity pilgrims centre their lives on the Sunday Mass. Sharing in the worship of other Christian traditions enriches them and increases their awareness of the riches of their own.

Unity pilgrims draw their inspiration from:

- St Paul's declaration: "*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'*" (1 Cor 12:21),
- The command of Jesus: "*Love one another just as I have loved you*" (John 13:34) – this command applies to us not only as individuals but also as congregations of the Church.
- Jesus' prayer for unity: "*Father, may they all 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*" (John 17:21).

The initiative began with repeated visits by unity pilgrims from Clonard Monastery to the Sunday worship of Protestant congregations on the Shankill – Presbyterian, Methodist and Church of Ireland. The initial Shankill response was a cautious welcome. But by being present several times over the years at their Sunday worship the unity pilgrims have built up a relationship of trust and acceptance with those congregations. The Shankill people have come to see that the pilgrims have no hidden agenda.

Unity pilgrims come in friendship and love to worship with their brothers and sisters in Christ. They look for nothing in return, only that God may be glorified by the witness of their love. Unity pilgrims are pastoral agents of the Holy Spirit mending the torn net of the Church. As prophets of the corporate reconciliation of the Churches they call all towards the day when, by God's grace, we will be one Church in many Churches.

Being present with a Protestant congregation on their Holy Communion Sunday can be painful both for the Catholic unity pilgrims and for the host congregation. It is then that both experience most deeply their real but incomplete communion. For some this can be a time of intense sorrow. It can also become a time of grace. As a grassroots reconciliation initiative the unity pilgrims do not have the power to change the canon law. But over the years they have found ways of dealing creatively with our differences.

When Catholic unity pilgrims plan to be present at a Holy Communion service it is better if they work out beforehand with the minister an arrangement such as the following:

- That after the distribution of Holy Communion the minister would acknowledge their presence.

- That the minister would then bless them and pray that our Churches may, in one and the same faith and love, prepare resolutely for the day on which we may share in a common Eucharist.

When a unity pilgrim group from a Protestant congregation comes to join in the Catholic Eucharist a similar arrangement is recommended:

- That after the distribution of Holy Communion the celebrant would acknowledge their presence.
- That the celebrant would then bless them and pray that our Churches may, in one and the same faith and love, prepare resolutely for the day on which we may share in a common Eucharist.

This way of dealing with our present differences enables the Catholic and Protestant pilgrims to honour the ordained ministry of the host congregation. Through the arrangements outlined above the pilgrim visits become significant moments on the journey of reconciliation of our Churches.

### **5. Together in Conversation**

This is the everyday ecumenism of life in which every believer is involved. It is also a way of doing theology together. Six heart to heart conversations on what Catholics believe, introduced by a Catholic theologian and chaired by a Shankill minister, constituted a breakthrough in Shankill/Falls relationships in April/May 2009 – an undermining of the walls of separation! The conversations focused on doctrines that in some degree divide Catholic and Protestant:

- a) *Being Born Again - What Catholics believe about Salvation*
- b) *The Word of God - What Catholics believe about the Bible*
- c) *The communion of Saints - What Catholics believe about the Virgin Mary*
- d) *Our Departed Loved ones - What Catholics believe about Prayers for the Dead*
- e) *The Bishop of Rome - What Catholics believe about the Pope*
- f) *Holy Communion – What Catholics believe about the Eucharist*

There was not a harsh or hurtful word spoken. In every session there was warm friendship and deep pondering of the mystery of our common faith. In such conversations the misconceptions of history concerning one another are explored and overcome. Christians from different Church traditions strengthen one another's faith. They come to recognize that the Fountain of Living Water sustains them all.

### **6. Together in Mission**

As in Clonard/Fitzroy Fellowship where two congregations share their gifts and become joint sponsors of a variety of ecumenical initiatives.

As in Cornerstone Community where members of different Churches come together in a permanent witness to community, to prepare the way for the reconciled Church that is our hope and to be a midwife to its birth.

As in “Tres Dias” where people from different Church traditions seek together to renew their personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

As in the “Kairos” Prison Ministry where the Churches can work together to bear witness to God’s unconditional love for prisoners.

If we continue “*filling the water jars together*” in whatever ways we can, God, in his own way and in his own time, will reward our efforts with the gift of full communion through an Ecumenical Council of all the Christian Churches. This is our unshakeable hope.

### **SUMMARY OF THEME**

1. It is above the Word lived and shared together that has the power to guide, reconcile and transform.
2. Christians discover the joy of coming together in one and the same faith and love in order to prepare resolutely for the day on which they may share in a common Eucharist.
3. It is on Jesus’ prayer “*That all may be One*” and not on their own strength that his disciples base their yearning for full and visible communion within history.
4. Being ‘Together on Sunday’ is a simple but profound form of spiritual ecumenism, which is the soul of the ecumenical movement
5. Receptive ecumenism and the call to Catholic learning will lead all forward towards the unity Jesus wills for his Church.
6. There are many ways in which the Churches can be together in common mission.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. In what ways have you been a servant of unity?
2. What do the words of Jesus “*Fill the water jars*” mean to you to-day?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

God our Father,  
may Christ’s disciples have the grace, through your Holy Spirit,  
to discover that the most profound joy within your Church,  
lies in our coming together,  
in one and the same faith and love,  
in order to prepare resolutely for the day  
on which we may share in a common Eucharist. Amen. (Jean Marie Tillard O.P.).