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Meditations: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (Day 5)

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18-25 January).

- The Church is catholic and universal by nature
- A sign of catholicity: diversity in matters open to opinion
- Zeal for souls should lead us to become all things to all men

SAINT JOSEMARIA prayed the Creed with deep devotion, savouring the fact that he belonged to the Church and so was part of God's family. During Mass or when visiting St Peter's Basilica, he recited the Creed with a special devotion, which we see reflected in that point in *The Way*: "*Et unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam!…* I can understand why you pause, in your prayer, savouring the words: I believe in the Church, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic."[1] On this fifth day of the Christian Unity Octave we will meditate on the third note of the Church: her catholicity or universality.

When the risen Christ was about to depart from this world and ascend into heaven, He gathered together the Eleven and said to them: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,*

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (*Mt* 28:18-20). Ten days later, at Pentecost, the Apostles received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and they went out into the streets of Jerusalem and then to all the pathways of the world, to announce the good news of our Lord. That day, in the city of David, people of all tongues *from every nation under heaven* (*Acts* 2:5) heard their preaching.

The Church is catholic because she has been sent by our Lord to everyone on earth. "The ultimate goal of those sent by Jesus is universal."[2] The Second Vatican Council described Christ's command in these words: "All men are called to belong to the new people of God. Wherefore this people, while remaining one and only one, is to be

spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages."[3]

St Josemaría said that although the Catholic Church's geographical extension is a visible sign of her universality, "the Church was catholic already at Pentecost. It was born catholic from the wounded heart of Jesus, as a fire which the Holy Spirit enkindled."[4] Our life of faith requires us to care for this catholicity: we should pray for our brothers and sisters in the faith on every continent; we should be eager to see Jesus' name known and loved in every corner of the world; we must feel as our own the difficulties the Church is going through in places perhaps far from us. All this is also part of our relationship with Christ, "for sanctity does not admit of any frontiers."[5]

IN THE YEARS after Pentecost Christ's message gradually spread among the Mediterranean lands, and pagans began to join the ranks of the first Christians. In order to preserve unity, the Apostles at the Council of Jerusalem left us this standard of freedom: they decided with regard to converts who were not from the Jewish faith *to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things* (*Acts* 15:28). They understood that the life of the Church is aimed above all at offering the simple message of the Gospel and a personal encounter with Jesus.

Together with catholicity, the Church defends and fosters legitimate variety in all that God has left to the free initiative of men. In the Work we have learned from the beginning not only to respect that diversity but to foster it actively: "Because the Work's aims are exclusively supernatural, its spirit is one of

freedom, of love for the personal freedom of all men. And since this is a sincere love for freedom and not a mere theoretical statement, we love the necessary consequence of freedom which is pluralism. In Opus Dei pluralism is not simply tolerated. It is desired and loved, and in no way hindered."[6]

This pluralism is a characteristic feature of St Josemaría's message, which leads us to strive to bring Christ's love to every corner of the world and to all human activities. Hence the Prelate of Opus Dei points out that "a person who loves freedom manages to see the positive and attractive aspects of what others think."[7] And he insists that "the attitude of valuing people who are different, or who think differently, denotes inner freedom and openness."[8] "From this freedom," St Josemaría says, "will flow a healthy sense of personal

responsibility … and you will not only know how to give up your own opinion when you see that it does not fit well with the truth, but you will also be able to accept the views of others, without feeling humiliated because you have changed your ideas.”[9]

OUR CONTRIBUTION to the Church’s expansion, spreading the good news of Christ everywhere, is the fruit of a generous self-giving. We know that these efforts of ours will later be transformed into the joy of having made others happy. That is why we are not satisfied with reaching just a few people or only those who meet certain conditions. Our apostolic zeal leads us to speak to everyone about our Lord Jesus Christ: “Ask with me for a new Pentecost, which will once again set the world alight.”[10]

St Paul is called the *Apostle of the Gentiles* because he spread the faith far and wide, without excluding anyone. He himself summed up his evangelizing work: *For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more … To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some* (*1 Cor* 9:19, 23). Even in the midst of the great difficulties the Church underwent in its beginnings, the first Christians, aware of the universality of the Gospel, took on the duty of spreading the faith to neighbouring regions. As Pope Francis said, thanks to the wind of persecution "the disciples went further with the seed of the word and sowed the word of God."[11] St Josemaría likewise urged us to follow the example of the first Christians and overcome any comfort-seeking in our eagerness to spread the faith: "Christians must

show readiness at all times to get on with everyone, giving to all – by the way they treat others – the possibility of getting closer to Christ Jesus."[12]

In order to spread the Church everywhere it is important to go deeper into the basics of the faith. In this way we will learn to communicate it in all its fullness and learn how to bring it to each person taking into account their way of being and culture. "When a Christian understands what catholicity means and practises it, and he realizes the urgent need to proclaim the Good News of salvation to all creatures, he knows that as the Apostle teaches, he has to make himself *all things to all men, that all may be saved.*"[13]

We conclude our prayer by having recourse to our Lady, who looks upon all men and women as her children, and we ask her to help us make Christ known everywhere we

go. Mary will teach us to take advantage of the opportunities offered us by our work and our social and family relations to bring God's joy to many hearts.

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[1] St Josemaría, *The Way*, 517.

[2] Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Vol II, p. 323.

[3] Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 13.

[4] St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 9.

[5] St Josemaría, *In Love with the Church*, 10.

[6] St Josemaría, *Conversations*, 67.

[7] Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Letter, 9 January 2018, 13.

[8] Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Letter, 1 November 2019, 13.

[9] St Josemaría, *Letter 9 January 1951*, 23-25.

[10] St Josemaría, *Furrow*, 213.

[11] Pope Francis, Homily, 19 April 2018.

[12] St Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, 124.

[13] St Josemaría, *The Forge*, 953.

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