



Pastoral Letter

To be read at all Masses on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity
21 and 22 May 2005

Dear Friends,

The last few weeks have been a remarkable time for the Catholic Church. The death of our great Pope, John Paul II, was a powerful witness to the world of the Christian revelation that Christ has overcome death and won for us all the promise of eternal life. The media responded to the wishes of people throughout the world and gave excellent coverage of the events leading up to Pope John Paul's death and the funeral mass. Pope John Paul left us a great legacy in his writings and thoughts. They provide a large body of Christian teaching that has still to be fully received into the hearts and lives of the faithful members of the Church. When this has happened, I am sure that he will be proclaimed throughout the world as John Paul the Great. But what is also becoming clear about him whom we knew as a world traveller, a great preacher of the Gospel and a man who shared his strength of spirit with the world, is that he was a person with mystical qualities. His life of continuous prayer and self-giving brought him close to God, and through him God was very close to us. His undoubted holiness provoked a response in millions of people throughout the world that challenges the Church to respond. How do we build on the upsurge of faith that was visible, almost tangible, throughout these days when the Holy Spirit woke up the world to God's presence? This is a challenge that each of us can meet in our daily lives; especially through striving even harder to give good example to others by living a life of Christian virtue.

In Pope Benedict XVI, we are truly blessed. He brings his personal gifts to the Papacy: a sharp mind, a kind pastoral manner and true humility. As he embarks on his ministry as Peter among us, he has asked for our prayers, and these he will certainly have. We can also be sure that in his ministry he will work for unity in the Church, and between churches. He will offer the hand of friendship to people of other faiths and, like his predecessor Benedict XV, he will be a pope of reconciliation and peace. Despite attempts in the media to portray him as the leader of a conservative faction in the Catholic Church, he has already won the hearts of Catholics with his sermons. Observers outside of the Church often fail to understand that although Catholics may from time to time express differences amongst themselves we are all united together by faith under the Vicar of Christ. It may make spectacular headlines in the newspapers or on the television news to emphasise such differences but the speed with which the Cardinals elected Pope Benedict showed very clearly

that serious divisions within the Church simply do not exist. The Cardinals are united in their choice of the successor of St. Peter and we, God's people, rejoice in the election of our new Pope.

During this last week, another sign of great hope has been given to the Church. The document, 'Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ', has been published by the Anglican and Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). This is the last in the present series of documents that examine the differences and similarities in the doctrine and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion. I have been privileged to serve on the commission and I hope that the work it now presents to the Church is a positive contribution to ecumenism. One of the concluding remarks of the report emphasises that issues concerning doctrine about Mary or devotion to her need no longer be seen as a source of division between Christians, nor as an obstacle in a new stage of our growth to a visible communion between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. I am sure that the document will be well received and I hope that you will get an opportunity to read it for yourselves. There is no doubt that the road to unity is long but I believe that another important, albeit small, step has been taken.

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, we have much to be hopeful about. Catholics are united with Pope Benedict in proclaiming the resurrection of Christ, and we continue to reach out to other Christians to build unity. To work for church unity is to engage in the work of the Trinity. It is Jesus' prayer to his Father 'that they may all be one', and it should be our prayer as well. In praying this way we not only join our prayers to those of Our Lord but, since it is the Holy Spirit that always prays within us through the Son to the Father, we are taken up into the life and work of God, Three and One. The mystery of the Holy Trinity assures us that God is not far off and distant from us but near. It is in this way that God draws us into his life. That is why, even though we are humble workers in the vineyard of the Lord, to use Pope Benedict's description of himself, we can be sure that God's love for his Church and for us is strong.

We may pray, with St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, *'O my God, Trinity whom I adore ... Grant my soul peace. Make it your heaven, your beloved dwelling, and the place of your rest'*.

Your servant in Christ

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