

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: « Ecumenism: the pilot is the Holy Spirit »

In November 2016, during our fraternal meetings, let us work together on a text written by Cardinal Koch which presents some directives for an ecumenical journey. This text is full of hope and the possibilities of sharing.

Recall: At the monthly meeting, members should have at their disposal a Bible, at least one copy of the General Constitutions, a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and at least one copy of Living with Christ. Also, each member should have in hand their own copy of the Rule.

Good preparation – Good meeting

NOVEMBER 2016 MONTHLY MEETING

Opening Prayer and Song: (According to the Ritual or chosen by the Fraternity)

Reading: (choose a person who reads calmly)

Recall: See that during each meeting the members have in hand a copy of the New Testament.

Introduction

Ecumenism can be compared to a plane that has departed quickly but once in flight, seems to slowly move forward, writes Cardinal Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for the promotion of Christian unity, in the Italian edition of *L'Osservatore Romano* of July 8th 2016. He invites us to remember that the pilot of this plane is the Holy Spirit. The Swiss Cardinal also gives indications for the ecumenical journey, inspired by the Gospel story of the pilgrims of Emmaus.

Cardinal Koch`s Stand

When the plane is in flight, it seems to advance slowly. In looking at the last half century of ecumenical commitment, the first comparison that comes to mind is a plane trip. It begins, after some long preparations, by an accelerated rolling down the runway and a quick take-off. Having just reached the correct altitude and as the plane soars in the air, we easily have the impression of not going forward, or at the least to be going slowly. However, all the passengers should hold a certain hope that the plane will surely reach its destination. **As for** the Catholic Church`s commitment for unity between Christians, Vatican II Council has been this accelerated rolling on the runway, by which the Church found a new attitude towards the ecumenical movement. But after more than fifty years, we continue, to fly through the air, or at least that is how it seems to be for many. There certainly remains the legitimate hope that the

ecumenical plane will also land safely. This makes even more sense if we think about the true pilot, the Holy Spirit, who initiated this journey and who will certainly bring it to his goal.

Sharing:

1. What do you think about the Cardinal's comparison?
2. Do you agree with what he says? Why?

Share your answers on these questions during about 15 minutes.

The promulgation of Vatican II Council

At the time, the promulgation of Vatican II had created great hope and had led a good number of people to expect an imminent unity among Christians. Meanwhile, it has become clear that the ecumenical journey is long and more difficult than we first thought. This is why it is timely to replace the image of a journey in a plane for one of an earthly journey and, more precisely, the road the disciples of Emmaus took, asking ourselves what it can tell us in terms of the next steps toward the ecumenical reconciliation.

Firstly, we must seriously consider the image of the road. In the present ecumenical context, it is fundamental that Christian men and women, who live in different Christian communities, journey together on the road to unity and do all that is possible together. The ecumenical experience teaches us that unity grows by walking together and that being together on the road already signifies unity. This perspective is dear to Pope Francis' heart, who has expressed his ecumenical conviction in these strong words: « Unity will not come as a miracle at the end: unity comes on the journey, it is the Holy Spirit who does it on the journey.» It is this perspective that we must deepen today and live out concretely. Being on the road together : this is the first indication that the paschal chapter from Luke offers us.

Reflection:

Take the New Testament and find the biblical reference.

- What does this Gospel tell us?

Take the necessary time to reflect on the text.

The disciples of Emmaus

There is no doubt that the disciples' road towards Emmaus was not a happy one. On the contrary, the disciples were full of sadness because of what had happened in Jerusalem. They talked among themselves and with their unknown guide about what disturbed them. And thus we are given a second indication for this journey: authentic ecumenism lives in the mutual participation in the life of others, in the joy and in the suffering, as Paul has expressed it in this beautiful image : « If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. » (1 Cor 12, 26-27) Right now, a particular demonstration of this rule of life of ecumenical communion is found in the sad fact that we are witnessing the persecutions of Christians in a unique measure in history. Today, Christians are not persecuted because they are Protestant or Pentecostal, Orthodox or Catholic, but because they are Christian. Martyrdom, today, is ecumenical, and we must speak of the true ecumenism of martyrs, the ecumenism of blood. In fact, the blood of so many martyrs in

the world today does not divide but unites. In the perception of this reality is found a great challenge that Pope Francis has expressed in this memorable phrase: « If the enemy unites us in death, who are we to divide ourselves in life?» Really, is it not humiliating that those who persecute the Christians have perhaps a better ecumenical vision than we, Christians? I see in the experience of persecution and martyrdom, common to all Christians, the most convincing sign of ecumenism today.

Reflection:

Take some time to reflect on what is presented in the preceding paragraph.
Share your reflections (about 10-15 minutes)

Biblical Reflection:

Take the New Testament and read the story of the disciples of Emmaus Luke 24, 13-25 out loud. Afterwards, if you wish, share your thoughts, using one or two of the following questions:

1. What does this gospel teach us?
2. To whom does it speak?
3. How does it reach us personally?
4. Is it a message of hope? Is there another kind of message? Why and how is it?

Exchange of experience of suffering

In the exchange of experiences of suffering, on the road to Emmaus, the disciples search for a liberating word and they allow their unknown travel companion to explain to them the Holy Scriptures. From that emerges the third indication, that we, Christians, approach one another more when we listen to the Word of God and when speak of it together. The Reformation and the schism that followed in the 16th century were linked to a controversial interpretation of the Bible that went to the very heart of the Holy Scriptures. Leaving behind our divisions and regaining unity can only become possible if we travel the road of a common reading of the Holy Scripture. The more we immerse ourselves in the mystery of Jesus-Christ and his Word, the more we succeed in finding the road towards one another.

Sharing:

Following the reading of the preceding paragraph, can you give examples of this reconciliation?
Take a few moments for this sharing.

Deepening of points taken from the Rule and the General Constitutions

Rule 13

As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the first-born of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.

A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.

General Constitutions

Article 18.2

They should deepen the true foundations of universal kinship and create a spirit of welcome and an atmosphere of fraternity everywhere. They should firmly commit themselves to oppose every form of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion and against every attitude of indifference in relation to others.

Article 18.3.

They should work together with movements which promote the building of fraternity among peoples: they should be committed to "create worthy conditions of life" for all and to work for the freedom of all people.

Life – Objective:

During the month of November, let us encourage our members to imitate our holy patron, Francis of Assisi, and pray to our heavenly mother, the Virgin Mary ...

Events and Information from the Church and the Order

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

End of the meeting: (a prayer or song chosen by the fraternity)

At home

In order to continue the reflection, we suggest reading the following text.

Of course, the disciples of Emmaus` eyes were opened when the Lord broke the bread with them, thus awakening in their hearts a deep desire for unity. The fourth indication is therefore the understanding that we, humans, cannot make unity happen by ourselves, nor decide its form and time, we can only have it given to us. We, humans, can create divisions: history and the present show that we do this. We can but receive unity, by orienting ourselves toward the will of Jesus and by presenting him this desire in prayer. In the beginning of the ecumenical movement there was the introduction of the week of prayer for the unity of Christians. It was the start of a movement of prayer and only in this way will it remain the way to go. The prayer for the unity of Christians is, and continues to be, the beating heart of the ecumenical journey.

Let us take the time to pray together for the unity of Christian and keep in our hearts all those of our brothers and sisters that are persecuted, martyred and killed because of their Christian faith - whatever their faith or beliefs - and because of their commitment to follow Christ until death.