

Opening Prayer

Led by Laura L. Thank you!

Opening Bible Verse

[Second Sunday of Advent | USCCB](#)

Luke 3:4,6

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths: all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Topic: One united Church and other branches of Christianity/other religions

Four candles on an Advent wreath: hope, peace, joy, and love

Part 1: Hope and joy in Christian Unity

[Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 817-820](#)

Wounds to unity

817 In fact, "in this one and only Church of God from its very beginnings there arose certain rifts, which the Apostle strongly censures as damnable. But in subsequent centuries much more serious dissensions appeared and large communities became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church - for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame." The ruptures that wound the unity of Christ's Body - here we must distinguish heresy, apostasy, and schism - do not occur without human sin:

Where there are sins, there are also divisions, schisms, heresies, and disputes. Where there is virtue, however, there also are harmony and unity, from which arise the one heart and one soul of all believers.

818 "However, one cannot charge with the sin of the separation those who at present are born into these communities [that resulted from such separation] and in them are brought up in the faith of Christ, and the Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers in the Lord by the children of the Catholic Church."

819 "Furthermore, many elements of sanctification and of truth" are found outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church: "the written Word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope, and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as visible elements." Christ's Spirit uses these Churches and ecclesial communities as means of salvation, whose power derives from the fullness of grace and truth that Christ has entrusted to the Catholic Church. All these blessings come from Christ and lead to him, and are in themselves calls to "Catholic unity."

Toward unity

820 "Christ bestowed unity on his Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time." Christ always gives his Church the gift of unity, but the Church must always pray and work to maintain, reinforce, and perfect the unity that Christ wills for her. This is why Jesus himself prayed at the hour of his Passion, and does not cease praying to his Father, for the unity of his disciples: "That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, . . . so that the world may know that you have sent me." The desire to recover the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit.

Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 244:

"Commitment to ecumenism responds to the prayer of the Lord Jesus that 'they may all be one' (Jn17:21). The credibility of the Christian message would be much greater if Christians could overcome their divisions and the Church could realize 'the fullness of catholicity proper to her in those of her children who, though joined to her by baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her' We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God's face. Trusting others is an art and peace is an art. Jesus told us: 'Blessed are the peacemakers' (Mt 5:9). In taking up this task, also among ourselves, we fulfil the ancient prophecy: 'They shall beat their swords into ploughshares' (Is 2:4)"

[The Ecumenical Movement, A School for Virtue; an article by John W. Crossin, OSFS:](#)

"The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council." This first sentence of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Decree on Ecumenism (1964, #1) is still surprising to many Catholics.

How did the church come to embrace the ecumenical movement? Most authorities date the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement to the Edinburgh (Scotland) World Missionary Conference of 1910. The Conference was a gathering of Protestants and Anglicans. The Conference was concerned with collaboration in Christian Missions. Then as now divisions among Christians were hindering the acceptance of the gospel.

The sole Catholic participation was through a letter sent by Bishop Bonomelli of Cremona, Italy wishing the participants well. The letter was read aloud at the beginning of the Conference. Bishop Bonomelli mentioned at the time to some priests that he knew, including Angelo Roncalli, that an ecumenical council could come from the emergence of these church relationships.

The following fifty years witnessed occasional Catholic participation in ecumenical conversations. There was some softening of Catholic concerns about ecumenism over the decades. There was interest among some theologians such as the Dominican priest Yves

Congar—who much later was named a Cardinal by Pope John Paul II—in ecumenical matters. Congar wrote his groundbreaking book on Christian disunity in 1937.

These decades saw the founding of the World Council of Churches after World War II and the increased activity of the National Council of Churches in the United States.

Early in his pontificate Pope John XXIII (Angelo Roncalli) called the Second Vatican Council. The Holy Spirit, who is the principle of Church unity, had been gently at work during Pope John's days as Papal Ambassador first in Bulgaria (an Eastern Orthodox country), then in Turkey (a Muslim country) and lastly in France (a secularizing country).

The Decree on Ecumenism set the stage for the last fifty years of Catholic dialogue and conversation with our Orthodox, Protestant and Anglican brothers and sisters. The Decree gives "Catholic Principles on Ecumenism."

Jesus prayed for unity, that his disciples be one, [Jn 17:21] at the Last Supper. It is the Holy Spirit who brings about "the wonderful communion of the faithful..." (#2) Ultimately Christian unity is God's will and God's work and not solely our own.

The Decree exhorts all Catholics to participate in the work on Christian unity (#4). This work, our conversation, dialogue and service with others, calls for complete honesty. We must represent the position of others with truth and fairness.

We are called to a gentle mutual respect and trust in one another. For example, in the past we have sometimes engaged in comparing 'our best to their worst'. Honesty and mutual respect call us to search the past and the present together in order to come to the truth. Our conversation is based on the truth—as well as we can determine it.

This search leads us to acknowledge our own faults. 'Christ summons the Church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is an institution of men here on earth.' (#6)

Humility is a key virtue for ecumenists. We need to repent of our past faults in order to embrace the current guidance of the Holy Spirit. (#7)

The search leads us to value the virtues of our ecumenical colleagues. "...anything wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can contribute to our edification." (#4) I always remember that after Vatican II one of the senior priest-theologians of my religious order engaged in regular conversation with an Anglican colleague. He remarked one day at lunch that while they had theological differences, the Anglican priest was outstanding in living the Gospel.

In my experience, our conversation with our fellow Christians leads us to look deeper into the roots of our own faith. We clarify our deepest beliefs—and sometimes need to acknowledge our own misunderstandings of Catholic belief.

Ecumenical dialogue, rather than making us less Catholic, makes us more.

A deep search into our own faith can make us aware of commonalities that we share with our fellow Christians. It is the Holy Spirit who will help us work our way through the divergences which we also discover.

Ecumenical conversation leads us back to prayer. “This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name ‘spiritual ecumenism.’” (#8)

I think that ecumenical relationships are a School of Virtue. To engage others we need humility, honesty, patience, and gentleness. Sometimes we see these in our ecumenical partners. I hope they see them in us. I believe that we need saints to lead us on the road to unity.

A final virtue for today is courage. Many Christians throughout the globe are dying for their faith. Cardinal Koch of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity speaks of the Ecumenism of the Martyrs. We have no better leaders.

Part 2: Peace and Love in other religions

Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Church and non-Christians (Paragraphs 839 - 845)

"Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways."

The relationship of the Church with the Jewish People.

When she delves into her own mystery, the Church, the People of God in the New Covenant, discovers her link with the Jewish People, "the first to hear the Word of God." The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant. To the Jews "belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ", "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable."

And when one considers the future, God's People of the Old Covenant and the new People of God tend towards similar goals: expectation of the coming (or the return) of the Messiah. But one awaits the return of the Messiah who died and rose from the dead and is recognized as Lord and Son of God; the other awaits the coming of a Messiah, whose features remain hidden till the end of time; and the latter waiting is accompanied by the drama of not knowing or of misunderstanding Christ Jesus.

The Church's relationship with the Muslims.

"The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day."

The Church's bond with non-Christian religions is in the first place the common origin and end of the human race: All nations form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth, and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all against the day when the elect are gathered together in the holy city...

The Catholic Church recognizes in other religions that search, among shadows and images, for the God who is unknown yet near since he gives life and breath and all things and wants all men to be saved. Thus, the Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as "a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life."

In their religious behavior, however, men also display the limits and errors that disfigure the image of God in them: Very often, deceived by the Evil One, men have become vain in their reasonings, and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and served the creature rather than the Creator. Or else, living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair.

To reunite all his children, scattered and led astray by sin, the Father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his Son's Church. The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation. The Church is "the world reconciled." She is that bark which "in the full sail of the Lord's cross, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, navigates safely in this world." According to another image dear to the Church Fathers, she is prefigured by Noah's ark, which alone saves from the flood.

Excerpts from: [NOSTRA AETATE](#)

Declaration on the relation of the church to non-Christian religions

By: Saint Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965

From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense.

Men expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men: What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what is sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going?

Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust. Again, Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.

The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just

as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ-Abraham's sons according to faith -are included in the same Patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles. Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles making both one in Himself.

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men [who are] his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).

No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.

The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to "maintain good fellowship among the nations" (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men, so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven.

"Lex orandi, lex credendi"

→ What the Church prays is what is believed

We pray in a special way on Good Friday the [Solemn Intercessions](#) (the part where we stand and kneel): specifically praying for the unity of Christians, for the Jewish people, and for those who do not believe in Christ and for those who do not believe in God.

Intercessory Prayer for those who do not believe in Christ:

Let us pray also for those who do not believe in Christ,
that, enlightened by the Holy Spirit,
they, too, may enter on the way of salvation.
Almighty ever-living God,
grant to those who do not confess Christ
that, by walking before you with a sincere heart,
they may find the truth
and that we ourselves, being constant in mutual love
and striving to understand more fully the mystery of your life,
may be made more perfect witnesses to your love in the world.
Through Christ our Lord.
R. Amen.

Discussion question:

What's one way that churches or parishioners near you engage in Christian unity? How can you incorporate actively praying for the unity of all religions this advent season?

Prayer Intentions:

- For those who lack peace in their families and for peace in my family
- For my family to reflect Christian unity
- For Claudia and Parul
- Prayers for healing in my family and peace for the future

Closing Prayer

God of all, we pray as one, that we may be one, just as the Lord Jesus prayed we may be one in Him. Your son Jesus compels us to be reconciled to one another. May our spirits be joined to Your Holy Spirit, that we may witness to the visible unity of your Church. May we all recognize that we are truly one with You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and grow together in peace. We ask for eyes to see You in people of other religions, Christian or not, and for hearts to always love each person we encounter. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

[Prayer for Christian Unity - Diocese of Saint Petersburg](#)

Upcoming:

First Saturday Mass, December 7th

Next meeting: TBD

All past egredi resources are linked [here](#)