

Unity Reflection: Alive in Christ

The theme for Unity Week was prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp (*the whole field*) in Switzerland. It was developed from “*Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit*”, found in John 15:1-17 and expresses Grandchamp Community’s vocation to **prayer, reconciliation and unity in the Church and the human family**. In other words, in coming together this morning, seeking to develop the unity that already exists among us is not only good for all our Churches but also good for humanity as a whole. It so happens that Pope Francis has asked Catholics throughout the world to Celebrate the *Word of God* on this Sunday too. It could not be more apt. The Word of God, as found in scripture, inspires the reflection today and the Word of God whom John identifies with Jesus Christ is the source and origin of our unity. They believe, as do we, that in our reflection and prayer, inspired by scripture, we are letting ourselves be transformed by the Word.

Listen to the following that Grandchamp use to inspire their daily prayer:

The Word of God is very close to us. It is a blessing and a promise of happiness. If we open our hearts, God speaks to us and patiently transforms that which is dying in us. God removes that which prevents the growth of real life, just as the vine grower prunes the vine.

Regularly meditating on a biblical text, alone or in a group, changes our outlook. Many Christians pray the Beatitudes every day. The Beatitudes reveal to us a happiness that is hidden in that which is unfulfilled, a happiness that lies beyond suffering: blessed are those who, touched by the Spirit, no longer hold back their tears but let them flow and thus receive consolation. As they discover the wellspring hidden within their inner landscape, the hunger for justice and the thirst to engage with others for a world of peace, grows in them.

We are constantly called to renew our commitment to life, through our thoughts and actions. There are times when we already taste, here and now, the blessing that will be fulfilled at the end of time.

“Pray and work that God may reign throughout your day.

Let the Word of God breathe life into your work and rest.

Maintain inner silence in all things so as to dwell in Christ.

Be filled with the spirit of the Beatitudes, joy, simplicity, mercy.”

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In his letter to the Ephesians, St Paul spells out a prayer which can be adapted and shared together: *We pray that Christ will be more and more at home in our hearts, living within us as we trust in him. May our roots descend deep into the soil of God’s marvellous love;*¹⁸⁻¹⁹ *and may we be able to feel and understand, as all God’s children should, how long, how wide, how deep, and how high his love really is; and experience this love for ourselves. And so, at last, we will be filled with God himself.*

And let us also take to heart the request of the Grandchamp community:

To pray the Beatitudes often because they reveal to us a happiness that is hidden in that which is unfulfilled, a happiness that lies beyond suffering: blessed are those who, touched by the Spirit, no longer hold back their tears but let them flow and thus receive consolation. As they discover the wellspring hidden within their inner landscape, the hunger for justice and the thirst to engage with others for a world of peace, grows in them.

In reflecting on our theme, *Alive in Christ*, it follows that the more we encounter the presence of Christ in ourselves, in the people around us and in our creation, the more we will be brought together, the more we will recognise the unity that exists among us.

Jesus began his ministry calling for Repentance. Repentance is not just a turning away from sin but discovering how God is present. When we pray for mercy, Jesus not only forgives us willingly and lovingly, he goes on to say that now you are forgiven you will find me in caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, visiting and helping those in prison, caring for those in need. Finding Christ's presence in so many ways, allows his love to grow stronger within us and we see those around us more and more as our sisters and brothers. After all, Christ is the one who slowly but surely washes away the obstacles that we believe we face and often shows us that they are really riches to be shared.

One of best ways of really knowing Jesus is through scripture, through his stories, his miracles, his actions and his words. One recommendation for meditating on scripture is to become part of the story, a disciple, the one being healed, eating with Jesus or even as one who is listening. Through this kind of listening, Jesus becomes more than a collection of facts or information, he gradually takes root in our lives and instils in us a desire to know him better and, next time, listen even more attentively to his word. I have the very special privilege and honour of celebrating funerals. In listening to the eulogies, the person who died becomes very real. I not only hear about their love and goodness, their generosity and caring but can feel their presence both in the person speaking and in the words spoken. When people of faith share their stories and experiences of Christ, they share their faith. The Christ who is alive in them comes alive in us all. In doing this, Unity will grow ever stronger because we allow Christ to work within us, healing what needs to be healed, nurturing and strengthening the faith in each of us, inspiring us to work and pray more together until we are all truly and fully *alive in Christ*. This shared and valued Unity among the Churches has helped mould Hitchin into a welcoming and mutually supportive town. It is because we have gathered to share the word of God in prayer and reflection together that the healing and growth of Unity among us continues to take place. Long may it continue!

Ephesians 3:14-21 (Living Bible)

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ When I think of the wisdom and scope of his plan, I fall down on my knees and pray to the Father of all the great family of God—some of them already in heaven and some down here on earth—¹⁶ that out of his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you the mighty inner strengthening of his Holy Spirit. ¹⁷ And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts, living within you as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvellous love; ¹⁸⁻¹⁹ and may you be able to feel and understand, as all God's children should, how long, how wide, how deep, and how high his love really is; and to experience this love for yourselves, though it is so great that you will never see the end of it or fully know or understand it. And so at last you will be filled up with God himself.

²⁰ Now glory be to God, who by his mighty power at work within us is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of—ininitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, or hopes. ²¹ May he be given glory forever and ever through endless ages because of his master plan of salvation for the Church through Jesus Christ.

The Beatitudes

5 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.