

*Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2025*

*Anglican Centre, Rome*

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

To the best of my knowledge, in most of our traditions, as demonstrated in our liturgies, penitential rites, etc., our point of departure is the recognition that we are sinners. Jesus is the friend of sinners: he keeps company with them, shares meals with them; he clearly enjoys being with them much more than with the scribes and Pharisees, and they with him. It is sufficient to recall the enthusiasm of Zacchaeus. He came not for the healthy but the sick, as Matthew testifies of himself. Nearly all the great figures in the Bible are also sinners: Moses, David, Paul, etc.

This is all well and good in theory, and appropriate beating of breasts is encouraged, but when we get down to reality the situation is a little different. When we are brought face to face with our real sins, we are scandalised by ourselves. When our institutions are found to be wanting, society and in particular the press condemn them and us with them. Of course, they are right to do so but I ask myself if we are not complicit through the image of the Church that we have at times projected. We are to be salt and light, but the salt does get dirty and the light can fade, and any pretence otherwise would be disingenuous. Sometimes we are simply good for nothing, useless servants indeed.

In this regard and perhaps to raise my spirits a little, I found the reading from Jeremiah instructive: “In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David .... In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness’. The Lord ..... the Lord!

I suspect that as “professional” Christians we tend to deceive ourselves by thinking and feeling that in fact it is we who are the righteous and should be seen so to be and treated accordingly. Thus, when we fail and fall, the façade, the construct of our righteousness collapses and everything seems to tumble around us. We may have said many times that we are a community of sinners in need of conversion, but do we really believe this? The reaction, the criticism, the condemnation are perhaps more understandable because of the self-righteousness that has come across previously. And yet, it is fundamental to our faith that the Lord alone is our righteousness, and that we can never make such a claim of ourselves, for to do so would be to deny our need of salvation and continual conversion. We are in danger of espousing a religion based on ourselves, faith in ourselves and not on a transcendent God and Father. This might come within what the Holy Father describes as being “self-referential”.

John states in his Prologue, and in no uncertain terms, the very opposite: The darkness does not overcome the light and Christ is that light. It is the Word who becomes flesh and gives power to become children of God. Do we believe this? Do we share the faith of the Apostles or do we prefer faith Christian in name but grounded in ourselves and not rooted in God? If there is a real crisis in the Church, I do not think it is a matter of discipline and morality, but of faith, and what we truly believe; this is our challenge today. It is faith that renews discipline and morality, and not the other way round.

As Christians, we can only aspire to be truly united if we are exclusively focused on Christ Jesus, the Son of God “consubstantial – homoousios – with the Father”. This year’s commemorations of the First Council of Nicea are an explicit invitation to us all to deepen our understanding and commitment to the faith expressed in the Creeds, which are the enduring legacy and riches of that first great ecumenical Council.

Now I am going to draw unapologetically on some most enlightening reflections by His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch published a few days ago in Vatican News. The Cardinal instructs us that “at the beginning of the IV century the Christological

question had become the crucial problem of Christian monotheism”. This is explained with reference to the teaching of Arius “who adopted the philosophical thought of the day in order to maintain a rigid monotheism in which Jesus Christ is excluded from the concept of God”. Cardinal Koch recalls that already in the Nineties of the last century Joseph Ratzinger observed that the contemporary situation is similar to that of the IV century with the rise of a “new Arianism”. The conclusion being that “the Christian faith stands or falls today on the Christological confession of the Council of Nicea”. Cardinal Koch explains this when he writes that the “Christological Credo of the Council has become the base of (our) common Christian faith.” He reflects that: “In fact, in order to restore the unity of the Church it is necessary that there be an agreement on the essential contents of the faith, not only between the Churches and Ecclesial Communities of today, but also with the Church of the past, and in particular with its apostolic origins. The unity of the Church is founded on apostolic faith, which in baptism is passed on and entrusted to every new member of the Body of Christ”. I can only commend the Cardinal’s text to you in its entirety.

I do not know what Archbishop Ian and Kamla consider to be their legacy as they conclude their term in Rome, but I think many of us have benefited from their clear dedication to Gospel and the Mystery which is Christ in His Church. And you have done this with great humanity and kindness. May the Lord reward you and your loved ones with abundant blessings.

So, brothers and sisters, with confidence in the righteousness of the Lord alone, let us resolve to persevere in our prayer and our work for the unity of Christ’s Church, called as it is to be the Sacrament of Salvation for all God’s children.