

Office for unity

Thursday, February 23, 2023

Meditation text

During this year's Lenten season of prayer for unity, we will hear different writings from Abbé¹ Paul Couturier.

Paul Couturier was born in 1881 in Lyon (France), and was ordained a priest in 1906. He taught Natural Sciences, Physics, and Chemistry for many years before discovering his ecumenical vocation, thanks to several encounters. In 1936, he organized the first interdenominational spiritual meeting (with Catholics and Protestants) in Erlenbach, Switzerland, which led to the birth of the "Groupe des Dombes" in 1937. Abbé Paul Couturier was the pioneer of spiritual ecumenism at the foundation of the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, praying for unity "according to Christ's will, and according to his means". He died in Lyon on March 24, 1953.

The following is an extract of his writings in 1944 about his vision of the 'Invisible Monastery' :

"If every Thursday evening, the weekly commemoration of Holy Thursday, an increasing multitude of Christians of all denominations formed a sort of huge network enfolding the earth, like a vast invisible monastery into which everyone was to be engrossed in prayer of Christ for unity, wouldn't that be the dawn of Christian unity breaking over the world?"

"Is it not the deep and fervent attitude of spiritual emulation that the Father is waiting for to realize the visible unity of the body of the Church?"

"This Invisible Monastery is made up of all those souls to whom the Holy Spirit has made known, with an intimate understanding, and because they have really tried to open themselves to His fire and so to His light, the grievous state of divisions between Christians, and in whom this awareness has given rise to an enduring suffering and a corresponding regular practice of prayer and penitence..."

¹ 'Abbé' - originally an abbot, but more commonly the term applied to a member of the diocesan clergy in French-speaking countries

“The name 'Monastery' is appropriate because it is the same suffering, the same yearning, the same concerns, the same spiritual activity, the same goal which draws together into the heart of Christ this multitude which comes from every nation...”

“The cloister is none other than living in the Christ who prays for Unity. These Christians are consecrated to the solemn task of Unity, with the help of the Holy Spirit...”

“Moved by the same desire, the same fire and the same ardent longing, they live united in Christ, hidden away in the secret of God.”

“It has become their experience that God unites Christians in the same Love before uniting them in the same Faith.”

Intercessions

Prepared by the brothers and sisters in the Philippines

To be adapted according to the location

In the Philippines, Church leaders are already aware of the need for ecumenism, but this is not yet the case for ordinary Catholics. In the majority of cases, Catholics are very suspicious of Protestants and Evangelicals.

Lord, we pray for the different Christian Churches in the Philippines, South Korea, China and other parts of Asia, that they may put suspicion and fears behind them and enter into sincere and honest dialogue that leads to mutual recognition, forgiveness and unity.

2. Although the majority of Filipinos are Catholics, many of them often are victims of aggressive behavior from 'born again' Christians, who may try to recruit members or attack traditional Catholic practices and faith.

Lord, we pray that Christians of different denominations and backgrounds will discover the riches of their respective traditions and ways of worshiping you, and come to respect and acknowledge one other in order to walk together in peace.

3. As in other parts of the world, many Filipinos experience poverty and social marginalization. The gap between rich and poor is growing, despite living close to one another and sharing the same Christian faith.

Lord, we pray that the different Christian churches will work together for the poor and socially excluded, carry out community development projects, and witness to others how Christians can work together to improve the situation of the poor and vulnerable in society.

4. "Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy." Psalm 130 (129) :1

We pray for those affected by war, especially the Ukrainian people who have been suffering from the invasion of their land by Russian troops, for almost a year. May your Spirit of justice and peace guide the authorities in the decisions they must make.