

AETERNA DEI SAPIENTIA



Encyclical Letter On
POPE LEO THE GREAT

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Encyclical Letter of His Holiness

POPE JOHN XXIII

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ENCYCLICAL LETTER

COMMEMORATING THE FIFTEENTH CENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF SAINT LEO THE GREAT, SUPREME PONTIFF AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

TO OUR VENERABLE BRETHREN, THE PATRIARCHS,
PRIMATES, ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS AND OTHER
ORDINARIES IN PEACE AND COMMUNION
WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE

POPE JOHN XXIII

VENERABLE BRETHREN
HEALTH AND APOSTOLIC BENEDECTION

INTRODUCTION

The eternal wisdom of God which “reaches from end to end mightily, and orders all things sweetly”¹ seems to have impressed His image with singular splendor upon the spirit of the Supreme Pontiff, St. Leo I.

This “greatest among the great,”² as Our predecessor Pius XII of venerable memory rightly called him, appeared to be gifted in extraordinary measure with intrepid strength and paternal goodness. We, called by Divine Providence to occupy the Chair of Peter, which St. Leo the Great made so illustrious with wisdom of government, richness of doctrine, with magnanimity and with his inexhaustible charity, feel it Our duty, Venerable Brothers, on the occasion of the fifteenth centenary of his blessed passing, to recall his virtues and immortal merits, certain as We are that it will contribute notably to the common advantage of souls and the exaltation of the Catholic religion.

The true greatness of this Pontiff is not chiefly bound to the fearless act of courage with which he, unarmed and vested solely

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with the majesty of Supreme Priest, faced the fierce Attila, king of the Huns, in the year 452, on the banks of the Mincio River and persuaded him to retreat beyond the Danube. It was undoubtedly a most noble gesture, especially worthy of the peaceful mission of the Roman pontificate. But in reality it represents only one episode and is only one indication of a life that was spent entirely for the religious and social welfare, not only of Rome and Italy but of the universal Church.

ST. LEO THE GREAT, PONTIFF, PASTOR AND DOCTOR OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

The words of Holy Scripture can well be applied to the life and activity of St. Leo: "The path of the just, as a shining light, goes forward and increases even to perfect day." ³ They apply in considering the three distinct and characteristic aspects of his personality: as faithful servant of the Apostolic See, as Vicar of Christ on earth, and as Doctor of the universal Church.

FAITHFUL SERVANT OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE

"Leo, Tuscan by birth, son of Quintianus," as the *Liber Pontificalis* informs us, ⁴ was born toward the end of the fourth century. But, since he lived in Rome from his early youth, he could rightly call Rome his homeland. ⁵ There, while still a young man, he was inscribed among the Roman clergy and attained the diaconate. In the years 430 to 439 he exercised a considerable influence in ecclesiastical affairs, in the service of Pope Sixtus III. He had friendly relations with St. Prosperus of Aquitania and with Cassianus, founder of the celebrated Abbey of St. Victor in Marseilles. From the latter, who urged him to write "*De incarnatione Domini*" ⁶ against the Nestorians, Leo received the truly exceptional praise for a simple deacon: "Honor of the Church and of the sacred ministry." ⁷

While he was in Gaul, where he was sent by the Pope at the suggestion of the court of Ravenna to settle the conflict between the patrician Ezio and the prefect Albino, Sixtus III died. It was then that the Church of Rome thought that it could not do better than entrust the power of the Vicar of Christ to the deacon Leo, who had shown himself to be as sound a theologian as he was a fine diplomat.

He then received episcopal consecration on September 29, 440, and his pontificate was one of the longest of the ancient Christian Church and undoubtedly one of the most glorious. He died in

November of 461 and was buried in the porch of the Basilea of St. Peter. In 688 Pope St. Sergius I had the remains of the holy pontiff transferred "to the rock of Peter" after the new basilica had been built, and they now rest beneath the altar dedicated to him.

Now, wishing simply to indicate the outstanding characteristic of his life, we can do no less than proclaim that the triumph of the Church of Christ over its spiritual enemies has rarely been so glorious as it was during the pontificate of St. Leo the Great. Truly, in the course of the fifth century he shown in the firmament of Christendom as a shining star. This can in no way be denied, particularly if one takes into consideration the doctrinal field of the Catholic faith. His name is, in fact, certainly linked with those of St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Cyril of Alexandria in this field. If St. Augustine, as all know, stood against the heresy of Pelagius and indicated anew the absolute necessity of grace to live honestly and achieve eternal salvation, and if St. Cyril of Alexandria defended against the erroneous affirmations of Nestorius the divinity of Jesus Christ and the divine maternity of the Virgin Mary, then for all effects St. Leo is, on his part, heir of the doctrine of the two distinguished luminaries of the Church of the East and the West, towers over all his contemporaries in the clear affirmation of these fundamental truths of the Catholic faith. And, as St. Augustine is acclaimed in the Church as doctor of grace, and as St. Cyril is acclaimed as doctor of the Incarnation, so St. Leo is celebrated above all as the doctor of the unity of the Church.

PASTOR OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

It is enough, therefore, to pass rapidly over the prodigious pastoral and writing activities of St. Leo in the long period of his pontificate to arrive at the conviction that he was the proclaimer and defender of the unity of the Church both in the fields of doctrine and discipline.

If one passes into the field of liturgy, it is easy to see that this most pious pontiff promoted the unity of worship, composing or at least inspiring some of the most elevated prayers, which are contained in the so-called *Sacramentario Leoniano*.⁸

He furthermore intervened with promptness and authority in the controversy over the oneness or double nature in Jesus Christ, achieving the triumph of the true doctrine concerning the

Incarnation of the Divine Word of God. By doing this, he immortalized his name for posterity.

In this respect one must recall the famous Letter to Flavianus, Bishop of Constantinople, in which St. Leo outlined with admirable clarity and propriety the doctrine on the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, in conformity with the teaching of the prophets, of the Gospel, of apostolic writings and of the formula of the Faith. ⁹

From this letter it seems timely to note the following truly graphic expressions: "The propriety of both natures remaining therefore integral, coming together in the single person, human nothingness was assumed by divine majesty, weakness by power, mortality by eternity; and in order to satisfy the debt of our condition, the inviolable nature was united to a susceptible nature, in such a manner that, as was indeed needed for our salvation, the one and irreplaceable mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ, could indeed die according to one nature, but not according to the other. Therefore, the Word, though assuming the complete and perfect nature of true man, was born true God, complete in His divine properties, complete also in ours." ¹⁰

Nor did he stop at this. Following his letter to Flavianus, in which he had broadly outlined "all that the Catholic Church believed and taught universally on the mystery of the Incarnation of the Lord," ¹¹ St. Leo condemned the Council of Ephesus of 449. In this council, in which recourse was had to unlawfulness and violence, there was an effort to make triumph the erroneous teaching of Eutychius who, being "very rash and too ignorant," ¹² was obstinate in not wishing to recognize any other than the one single nature, the divine, in Jesus Christ.

With good reason the Pope called this council "a theft," ¹³ because it opposed the clear provisions of the Apostolic See and dared with every means to "damage the Catholic Faith" ⁴ and to strengthen "the heresy which was completely opposed to the Christian religion." ¹⁵

The name of St. Leo is above all linked with the celebrated Council of Chalcedon of 451, the convocation of which, though requested by the Emperor Marcian, was accepted by the Pope only on condition that it be presided over by his legates. ¹⁶ This council, venerable brothers, constitutes one of the most glorious pages in the history of the Catholic Church. But we do not consider it necessary to recall it here in detail, since Our predecessor

Pius XII dedicated one of his most famous encyclicals, on the 15th centenary of the event, to this great assembly, in the course of which there triumphed with equal splendor the true faith in the two natures of the Incarnate Word and the primacy of the *magisterium* of the Roman Pontiff. ¹⁷

The solicitude of St. Leo for the unity and peace of the Church is evident from the fact that he hesitated to give his approval to the acts of the council. In reality, this hesitation is not to be ascribed either to negligence or to any motives of a doctrinal character, but—as he himself declared—to his intention of opposing Canon 28 of the acts of the council. In this Canon the Fathers of the council, in spite of the protest of the papal legates and with the obvious wish to gain the favor of the emperor of Byzantium, gave recognition to the primacy of the See of Constantinople over all the churches of the East.

This decision appeared to St. Leo to be an affront to the privileges of other more ancient and illustrious churches, which were also recognized by the Fathers of the Council of Nicea. Furthermore, it prejudiced the prestige of the Apostolic See itself. St. Leo clearly perceived that this danger lay more in the spirit which dictated it than in the words of Canon 28 itself, as results clearly from two letters, one of which was addressed to him by the bishops of the council, ¹⁸ and the other sent by him to the emperor.

In the latter, refuting the arguments of the Fathers of the council, he admonished the emperor: “The order of the things of the world is one thing, and another those things of God; there can be no stable structure outside of that rock which the Lord set as a foundation (cf. *Matt.* 16, 18). One who desires “that is not his due impairs his own rights.” ¹⁹

The sad history of the schism, which subsequently separated so many illustrious churches of the Christian East from the Apostolic See—as one may gather from the cited passage—goes to clearly demonstrate the well-founded fears of St. Leo regarding the future divisions in the heart of Christianity.

Our exposition of the pastoral zeal of St. Leo for the unity of the Catholic Church would be incomplete if we did not also recall, even though rapidly, his intervention in the question relating to the feast of Easter, as well as his vigilant concern that the relations between the Apostolic See and Christian princes be marked by mutual esteem, trust and cordiality. With the peace

of the Church always in view, he frequently exhorted these princes to cooperate with the episcopate "for full Catholic unity,"²⁰ to merit from God "in addition to the royal crown, also the palm of the priesthood."²¹

DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Besides being a most vigilant pastor of the flock of Christ and a courageous defender of the orthodox faith, St. Leo is celebrated through the centuries as a Doctor of the Church, that is, as an exponent and most excellent champion of those divine truths of which every Roman Pontiff is custodian and interpreter.

This is confirmed by the words of Our immortal predecessor, Benedict XIV, who in the bull "*Militantis Ecclesiae*," with which he proclaimed St. Leo as a Doctor of the Church, formulated this splendid eulogy: "Through his eminent virtue, through his wisdom, through his tireless zeal, he merited from the ancients the name of Leo the Great. The superiority of his doctrine, both in illustrating the highest mysteries of our Faith and in defending them against the rise of errors, as well as in formulating disciplinary and moral directives, to which may be added a singular majesty and richness of priestly eloquence, stands out to such a degree and is distinguished, due to the praise of so many men and to the enthusiastic exaltations of the councils, the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers, that a pontiff of such great wisdom is absolutely not to be placed second in fame and esteem to any of the holy doctors who flourished in the Church."²²

His fame as doctor emerges from the homilies and letters which posterity has preserved for us in considerable numbers. The collection of homilies embraces different questions, almost all connected with the cycle of the sacred liturgy. In these writings he reveals himself not so much as an exegete, dedicated to the exposition of a particular inspired book, nor as a theologian, a lover of deep speculations on divine truths, but rather as a faithful, acute and prolific exponent of Christian mysteries, conforming to the interpretations handed down by the councils, the Fathers and, above all, by the pontiffs who preceded him.

His style is simple and grave, lofty and persuasive, certainly worthy of being considered a perfect model of classic eloquence. However, he never sacrificed the accuracy of the truth he wished to express for elegance of speech. He did not speak or write to be admired, but to enlighten minds and inflame hearts to perfect conformity of the practices of life with the truths professed.

In the letters, addressed in his capacity as Supreme Pastor to the bishops, princes, priests, deacons and monks of the universal Church, St. Leo shows exceptional gifts as a man of government, that is, an enlightened and supremely practical spirit, a will ready for action, firm in well matured decisions, a heart open to paternal understanding and full of that charity that St. Paul indicated to all Christians as "the better way." ²³

How can one not recognize that these sentiments of justice and of mercy, of strength joined with clemency, were born in his heart precisely out of that same charity that the Lord required of Peter before entrusting to him the custody of His lambs and His sheep? ²⁴

He always strove to make of himself a faithful copy of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, as can be deduced from the following passage: "We have on the one hand meekness and clemency, and on the other strictness and justice. And since all the ways of the Lord are the result of mercy and truth (—fidelity) (cf. Ps. 24, 10), we are compelled by the goodness which is proper to the Holy See to regulate our decisions in such manner that—after having pondered the nature of the crimes, the measure of which varies—we consider that some may be absolved and others must be rooted out." ²⁵

Both the homilies and the letters constitute, therefore, a most eloquent documentation of the thoughts and of the sentiments, of the words and of the actions of St. Leo, who was always anxious to insure the good of the Church, in truth, harmony and peace.

THE FIFTEENTH LEONINE CENTENARY AND THE SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

Venerable Brothers, in the imminence of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, in which the Bishops, gathered about the Roman Pontiff and in intimate communion with him, will give to the whole world a more shining spectacle of Catholic unity, it is all the more instructive and conforming to recall to mind, even though rapidly, the high idea which St. Leo had of the unity of the Church. This reminder will be at the same time an act of homage to the memory of the most wise Pontiff and, in the coming of the great event, a spiritual food for the souls of the faithful.

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH IN THE 'THOUGHT OF ST. LEO

St. Leo teaches us above all that the Church is one, because its Spouse, Jesus Christ, is one: "The Church is the bride, united

to Christ, her only Spouse, who admits of no error; so that in all the world we enjoy a single union, chaste and integral." 26

The saint believes also that this admirable unity of the Church began with the birth of the Incarnate Word, as emerges from these words: "It is the birth of Christ that determines the origin of the Christian people: the birth of the Head is also the birth of the body. Even if each one of those called (to the Faith) enters in his own turn, if all the children of the Church are distributed in the succession of time, yet the totality of the faithful, born at the baptismal font, are begotten with Him in His birth in the same way as they are crucified with Christ in His Passion, raised up with Him in His Resurrection and placed at the right hand of the Father in His Ascension." 27

Mary participated intimately in the mysterious birth of the "body of the Church," 28 through her virginity which was made fruitful by the work of the Holy Spirit. St. Leo exalted Mary as "Virgin, handmaid and mother of the Lord," 29 as "Genetrix of God," 30 and as perpetual Virgin. 31

The sacrament of Baptism, St. Leo furthermore observes, not only renders each Christian a member of Christ, but renders him also a participant in His regality and His spiritual priesthood: "All those who were regenerated in Christ, are also made king with the sign of the cross and consecrated priest with the anointing of the Holy Spirit." 32 The sacrament of Confirmation, which he calls "sanctification by chrism," 33 strengthens this assimilation to Christ the Head, while in the Eucharist it finds its completion: "The participation in the Body and Blood of Christ does nothing less than transform us into that which we consume, and we bear with us, in flesh and in spirit, Him Himself in whom we died, were buried and were raised again." 34

But one must note well that for St. Leo there can be no perfect union of the faithful with Christ the Head, nor union among themselves, as members of the same living and visible organism, if to the spiritual links of virtue, worship and sacraments there is not added the external profession of the same faith: "The integral and true Faith is a great bulwark to which nothing can be added or taken from by anyone: if the Faith is not single, it does not exist at all." 35

It is indispensable, however, to the unity of the Faith that there be union among the teachers of the divine truths, that is, the harmony of bishops among themselves in communion and sub-

mission to the Roman Pontiff: "The compactness of the whole body is that which gives origin to its sanctity and beauty, and, though this compactness requires unanimity, it requires above all the harmony of its priests. These have priestly dignity in common, but they do not have the same degree of power; because also among the apostles there was equality of honor, but difference of power, inasmuch as the grace of election was common to them all, but the right of pre-eminence over the others was granted only to one." ³⁶

THE BISHOP OF ROME, CENTER OF VISIBLE UNITY

The center and fulcrum of all visible unity of the Catholic Church, then, is the Bishop of Rome as successor of St. Peter and Vicar of Jesus Christ. The statements of St. Leo are only the faithful echo of the Gospel texts and constant Catholic tradition, as the following passage reveals: "In all the world only Peter is placed over the evangelization of all people, over all apostles and over all the Fathers of the Church, so that, although there are many pastors and priests in the midst of God's people, all are governed properly by Peter, as all are governed principally by Christ. In a great and marvelous way, oh beloved, the Lord deigned to make this man partaker of His power; and if He wishes that others also should have something in common with Him, He grants all to the others always by means of him." ³⁷

St. Leo believes it is fitting to insist on this truth which is fundamental to Catholic unity, that is, the divine and indissoluble bond between the power of Peter and that of the other apostles: "This power (to bind and to loose: cf. *Matt.* 14, 91) was certainly extended also to the other apostles, and it was transmitted to all the heads of the Church, but it was not without purpose that that which was to be communicated to all the others was recommended to one person alone. In fact, this power was entrusted to Peter particularly, exactly because the figure of Peter stands above all those who govern the Church." ³⁸

THE PREROGATIVE OF *Magisterium* OF ST. PETER AND HIS SUCCESSORS

But the Holy Pontiff does not forget the other essential bond of the visible unity of the Church, that is, the supreme and infallible *magisterium* reserved by the Lord to Peter personally and to his successors: "The Lord took care of Peter in a special way; He prayed for the faith of Peter in particular, almost as though the perseverance of the others would have been better guaranteed if the soul of their chief would not be overcome. In

Peter, therefore, the strength of all is protected, and the assistance of divine grace follows this order: the strength which was given to Peter through Christ, is conferred on the other apostles through Peter." 39

Whatever St. Leo says with such clarity and insistence about St. Peter, he says also about himself. He does not do so through the stimulus of human ambition, but through the deep persuasion that he is, no less than the Prince of the Apostles, the Vicar of Jesus Christ Himself, as can be understood from this excerpt of one of his sermons:

VAST INFLUENCE OF THE WORK OF ST. LEO

"While being filled with gratitude to God for His gift, we find no reason for pride in solemnly celebrating the anniversary of our priesthood, for we confess with all sincerity that all the good which we may have accomplished in our ministry is the work of Christ and not ours. We can do nothing without Him, and therefore we glory in Him, from whom derives all the efficacy of our work." 40

In saying this, it is far from St. Leo's mind that St. Peter ever be a stranger to the government of the Church. On the contrary, he wants to associate his trust in the constant assistance of its Divine Founder with his trust in the protection of St. Peter, whose heir and successor he professes to be, and "in whose stead all is done." 41 He attributes to the merits of the Apostle Peter more than to his own the fruits of his universal ministry. This is clearly indicated, among other things, in the following expression: "If, therefore, we accomplish or see any good, if we obtain anything from the mercy of God with our daily prayers, it is due to his (Peter's) works and merits, whose power perdures in his See and whose authority commands it." 42

In reality, St. Leo teaches nothing new. Like his predecessors, St. Innocent I 43 and St. Boniface I, 44 and in perfect harmony with the well-known Gospel texts upon which he comments (*Matt.* 16, 17; *Luke* 22, 31—32; *John* 21, 15—17) he is convinced of having received from Christ Himself the mandate of the supreme pastoral ministry. He declares: "The care that we must have for all the Churches has its origin principally in the divine mandate." 45

THE SPIRITUAL GREATNESS OF ROME

No one should marvel, therefore, if St. Leo associates the City of Rome with the exaltation of the Prince of the Apostles.

This is how he expresses this association in his sermon in honor of SS. Peter and Paul:

“These, truly, are the heroes, through whose labors, O Rome, the Gospel of Christ shines for you. . . It is these who raised you to this glory of being a holy city, a chosen people, a priestly and a royal city. This is done in such manner that, having become truly the head of the world in virtue of the Holy See of Blessed Peter, you might extend your empire more with the divine religion than it was extended with human domination. Although, having become powerful through many victories, you did indeed affirm your right of empire over land and sea, yet that which the labors of war subjected to you is less than that which Christian peace gave you.” ⁴⁶

Reminding his listeners, then, of the splendid testimony rendered by St. Paul to the faith of the first Christians of Rome, the great Pontiff urged them with this exhortation to preserve their Catholic Faith free from any stain of error:

“You, beloved of God and made worthy of the apostolic approval, to whom the blessed Apostle Paul and doctor of the gentiles said: “Your faith is proclaimed all over the world” (*Rom.* 1,8), preserve, therefore, in yourselves that which you know he, who exalted you so authoritatively, thought of you. May none of you make yourselves unworthy of this praise, so that not even the impiety of Euty chius may contaminate those who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, have never known any heresy for so many centuries.” ⁴⁷

The truly outstanding work performed by St. Leo for the safeguarding of the authority of the Church of Rome was not in vain. Due to the prestige of his Person, in fact, the “citadel of the Apostle Peter” was praised and venerated not only by the Bishops of the West present at the councils in Rome, but also by more than 500 members of the Oriental Episcopate gathered at Chalcedon ⁴⁸ and by the emperors of Constantinople. ⁴⁹

Even before the famous council, Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus, attributed in 449 to the Bishop of Rome and his privileged flock these high praises:

“Because of the prerogatives which honor your See, yours is the first place of all. Other cities glory in the fact that they are either large or have a great number of inhabitants. . . The Giver of every good has poured out His bounty on your city in super-

abundance, for it is the greatest and most illustrious of all cities, because it rules the world and is rich in population. . . Furthermore, you possess the tombs of Peter and Paul, common fathers and masters of truth, who illumine the souls of the faithful. The two most holy luminaries, indeed, had their origin in the Orient and cast their rays everywhere, but by their own choice they suffered death in the West and from there now illuminate the world. These enobled your See greatly; in this is the culmination of your goods. But their God even now makes their See illustrious, while from your sanctity He brings forth in it the rays of the true Faith." 50

The illustrious praises which the representatives of the Church of the Orient attributed to Leo did not diminish with his death. The Byzantine liturgy, on the feast of February 18 which is dedicated to him, exalts him as "leader of orthodoxy, doctor enhanced with piety and majesty, star of the universe, adornment of the orthodox, harp of the Holy Spirit." 51

Equally significant are the praises attributed to the great Pontiff by Merologius Gelasianus: "Our father Leo, admirable for his many virtues, continence and purity, consecrated Bishop of the great Rome, did many other things worthy of his virtues: but his work shone above all in that which concerns the honest Faith." 52

WISHES FOR THE RETURN OF THE SEPARATED BROTHERS

We wish to repeat, Venerable Brothers, that the chorus of praises singing the sanctity of the Supreme Pontiff, St. Leo the Great was in ancient times agreed upon both in the East and the West. Oh, may he once more receive the plaudits of all the representatives of the ecclesiastical learning of the Churches who are not in communion with Rome.

With the painful differences of opinion about the doctrine and pastoral action of the immortal Pontiff thus overcome, the doctrine which they also profess to believe will shine with greater brilliance: "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, Himself man, Christ Jesus." 53

We, having succeeded St. Leo in the episcopal See of St. Peter, as We profess with him faith in the divine origin of the mandate of universal evangelization and salvation entrusted by Jesus Christ to the Apostles and to their successors, so We likewise cherish the great desire to see all peoples enter on the way of truth, charity and peace.

And it is precisely for the purpose of rendering the Church more capable of accomplishing in our times this great mission that We decided to convene the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. We did so, confident that the impressive gathering of the Catholic hierarchy would not only strengthen the bonds of unity in faith, worship and government, which are the prerogatives of the true Church,⁵⁴ but would also attract the attention of numberless believers in Christ and would invite them to gather about "the great pastor of the sheep,"⁵⁵ who entrusted their perennial custody to Peter and his successors.⁵⁶

Our warm appeal for unity is intended to be, therefore, the echo of that which was made many times by St. Leo in the fifth century, and which was reminiscent of that addressed to the faithful of all the Churches by St. Ireneus, whom Divine Providence called from Asia to govern the See of Lyons and to confirm it with his martyrdom. After having recognized the uninterrupted succession of the Bishops of Rome, heirs of the very power of the two Princes of the Apostles,⁵⁷ he (Ireneus) concluded, exhorting: "Because of its pre-eminent superiority, it is with this Church that every Church, that is, all the faithful in the universe, must agree; and it is through communion with it that all these faithful (or, all the heads of the Churches) have preserved apostolic tradition."⁵⁸

But Our appeal for unity is intended to be, above all, an echo of the prayer which Our Saviour addressed to His Divine Father at the Last Supper: "That all may be one, even as Thou, Father, in Me and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us."⁵⁹ There is no doubt about the fulfillment of this prayer, just as the cruel Sacrifice of Golgotha was fulfilled. Did the Lord not say that His Father always hears Him?⁶⁰ We then believe that the Church for which He prayed and for which He sacrificed Himself on the cross, and to which He promised His abiding presence, has always been and remains one, holy, catholic and apostolic, just as it was instituted.

Unfortunately, as in the past, We must record with sorrow that also in these times the unity of the Church does not really correspond to the communion of all believers in one single profession of faith and in the same practice of worship and of obedience. However, it is a cause of comfort and of gentle hope to Us to see those generous and growing efforts done in various parts of the world for the purpose of reconstructing even the

visible unity of all Christians, which responds worthily to the intentions, commands and wishes of the Divine Saviour.

Realizing that unity, which is the wish of the Holy Spirit in so many souls of good will, cannot be fully and soundly realized unless it is in conformity with the prophecy of Jesus Christ that "there shall be one fold and one shepherd,"⁶¹ We pray Our Mediator and Advocate with the Father⁶² that He may give to all Christians the grace to recognize the marks of His true Church that they may become its devout children.

Oh, may the Lord grant that the blessed day of universal reconciliation may soon dawn, when an immense chorus of jubilant love will rise from the one and only family of the redeemed and when they, praising the divine mercy, will sing with the Psalmist: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."⁶³

The peaceful embrace of the children of the same heavenly Father, equally coheirs of the same reign of glory, will mark the celebration of the triumph of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Venerable Brothers, the 15th centenary of the death of St. Leo the Great finds the Catholic Church in sorrowful conditions which are similar in part to those which it knew in the fifth century. How many sufferings truly afflict the Church in these times and resound in Our paternal heart, as the Divine Redeemer clearly predicted!

We see that in many regions the "faith of the Gospel"⁶⁴ is in danger, and that there are not wanting attempts—which, thank God, for the most part are doomed to failure—to separate bishops, priests and faithful from the center of Catholic unity, that is, the Roman See.

Therefore, to check these grave dangers, We confidently invoke upon the Church militant the patronage of the holy Pontiff who wrote, suffered and did so much for the cause of Catholic unity. And to those who patiently cry after truth and justice, We address the comforting words which St. Leo spoke to the clergy, to the authorities and to the people of Constantinople: "Persevere, therefore, in the spirit of Catholic truth, and through Us receive the apostolic exhortation: 'For you have been given the favor on Christ's behalf—not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for Him.'" (*Phil.* 1, 29)⁶⁵

For all those, finally, who live in the Catholic Faith, We who, though unworthily, hold the place of the Divine Saviour on earth, make Ours the prayer which He made for His beloved disciples and for all those who would have believed in Him: "Holy Father. . . I pray that they may be perfected in unity." ⁶⁶

We, therefore, ask for all the sons of the Church the perfection of unity, that perfection which only charity, "the bond of perfection," ⁶⁷ can give. It is from a burning love for God and the ever ready, cheerful and generous practice of all the works of mercy toward one's neighbor that the Church, "temple of the living God," ⁶⁸ is clothed in each and all of its children with supernatural beauty.

Therefore, with St. Leo We exhort you: "Since, therefore, all the faithful together and separately constitute the one and the same temple of God, it is necessary that it be perfect in each one as it must be perfect in the whole; because, even if the beauty is not equal in all the members, nor the merits equal in such a great diversity of parts, the bond of charity produces the communion in beauty. Those whom a holy love unites, even though they do not share the same gifts of grace, enjoy their benefits mutually, however, and that which they love together cannot be foreign to them, for to find joy in the progress of others increases their own riches." ⁶⁹

At the end of this Apostolic Letter of Ours, may We be permitted to renew the ardent wish that came forth from the mind of St. Leo, that is, to see all those redeemed by the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, reunited in the same Church' militant, to see them resist, united and fearless, the powers of evil which continue to threaten the Christian faith from so many parts.

Because "the people of God become very powerful when, in the union of holy obedience, the hearts of all the faithful are in agreement, when in the camps of the Christian legions the preparation is the same in all parts and the defenses are the same everywhere." ⁷⁰

The prince of darkness shall not prevail as long as love reigns in the Church of Christ: "For the works of the demon will be destroyed with greater power when the hearts of men are burning with love for God and for neighbor." ⁷¹

May the apostolic benediction which We heartily impart to all of you, Venerable Brothers, and to the flock entrusted to each of you, be the comfort of Our hopes and token of divine graces.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, November 11, 1961, the fourth year of Our pontificate.

POPE JOHN XXIII

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ *Wisdom*, 8, 1.
- ² Cf. Sermon of Oct. 12, 1952, in *Discorsi e Radiomesaggi*, XIV, p. 358.
- ³ *Prov.*, 4, 18.
- ⁴ Cf. *Ed. Duchesne*, I, 238.
- ⁵ Cf. Ep. 31, 4, Migne, *PL* 54, 794.
- ⁶ Migne, *PL* 59, 9-272.
- ⁷ *De Incarn. Domini, contra Nestorium libr. VII, prol. PL* 50, 9.
- ⁸ Migne, *PL* 55, 21, 156.
- ⁹ Cf. *Ibid.* 54, 757.
- ¹⁰ "Salva igitur proprietate utriusque naturae et substantiae, et in unam coeunte personam, suscepta est a maiestate humilitas, a virtute infirmitas, ab aeternitate mortalitas: et ad resolvendum conditionis nostrae debitum, natura inviolabilis naturae est unita passibili: ut, quod nostris remediis congruebat, unus atque idem mediator Dei et hominum, homo Iesus Christus, et mori posset ex uno, et mori non posset ex altero. In integra ergo veri hominis perfectaue natura verus natus est Deus, totus in suis, totus in nostris." *Ibid.* col. 759.
- ¹¹ ". . .quid catholica Ecclesia universaliter de sacramento Dominicae incarnationis crederet et doceret." Cf. Ep. 29, *ad Theodosium august. PL* 54, 783.
- ¹² Cf. *Ep.* 28, *PL* 54, 756.
- ¹³ Cf. *Ep.* 95, 2 *ad Pulcheriam august. PL* 54, 943.
- ¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ cf. *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Cf. *Ep.* 89, 2, *ad Marcianum Imper. PL* 54, 931; *Ep.* 103, *ad Episcopos Calliarum PL* 54, 988, 991.
- ¹⁷ *Encycl. Letter Sempiternus Rex*, Sept. 8, 1951, A. A. S. a XXXXIII, vol. 18, p. 625, 644.
- ¹⁸ Cf. C. Kirch, *Enchir. fontium hist. eccl. antiquae, Friburgi in Br.* 4 ed. 1923, n. 943.

¹⁹ "Alia tamen ratio est rerum saecularium, alia divinarum; nec praeter illam petram, quam Dominus in fundamento posuit (*Matt.* 16, 18), stabilis erit ulla constructio. Propria perdit, qui indebita concupiscit." *Ep.* 104, 3, *ad Marcianum Imper.* *PL* 54, 995; cf. *Ep.* 106, *ad Anatolium, episc. Constant.* *PL* 54, 995.

²⁰ *Ep.* 114, 3 *ad Marcianum Imper.* *PL* 54, 1022.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Migne, *PL* 55, 337-340.

²³ *1 Cor.* 12, 31.

²⁴ Cf. *John* 21, 15-17.

²⁵ "Circumstant nos hinc mansuetudo clementiae, hinc censura iustitiae. Et quia *universae viae Domini, misericordia et veritas*, cogimur secundum Sedis Apostolicae pietatem ita nostram temperare sententiam, ut trutinato pondere delictorum, quorum utique non una mensura est, quaedam credamus utcumque toleranda, quaedam vero penitus amputanda." *Ep.* 12, 5, *ad Episcopos africanos*, *PL* 54, 652.

²⁶ "Illa est enim virgo Ecclesia, sponsa unius viri Christi, quae nullo patitur errore vitiari; ut per totum mundum una nobis sit unius castae communionis integritas." *Ep.* 80, 1, *ad Anatolium, episc. Constant.* *PL* 54, 913.

²⁷ "Generatio enim Christi origo est populi christiani, et natalis Capitis natalis est corporis. Habeant licet singuli quique vocatorum ordinem suum, et omnes Ecclesiae filii temporum sint successione distincti, universa tamen summa fidelium, fonte orta baptismatis, sicut cum Christo in passione crucifixi, in resurrectione resuscitati, in ascensione ad dexteram Patris collacati, ita cum ipso sunt in hac nativitate congeniti." *Serm.* 26, 2, *in Nativ. Domini*, *PL* 54, 213.

²⁸ *Col.* 1, 18.

²⁹ *Ep.* 165, 2, *ad Leonem imper.* *PL* 54, 1157.

³⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*

³¹ *Serm.* 22, 2, *in Nativ. Domini*, *PL* 54, 195.

³² "Omnes enim in Christo regeneratos, crucis signum efficit reges, Sancti vero Spiritus unctio consecrat sacerdotes." *Serm.* 4, 1, *in Nativ. Domini*, *PL* 54, 149; cf. *Serm.* 64, 6, *de Passione Domini*, *PL* 54, 357; *Ep.* 69, 4, *PL* 54, 870.

³⁸ *Serm.* 66, 2, *de Passione Domini*, *PL* 54, 365-366.

³⁴ "Non enim aliud agit participatio Corporis et Sanguinis Christi, quam ut in id quod sumimus transeamus; et in quo comortui, et consepulti, et conresuscitati sumus, ipsum per omnia

et spiritu et carne gestemus." Serm. 64, 7, *de Passione Domini*, PL 54, 357.

³⁵ "Magnum praesidium est fides integra, fides vera, in qua nec augeri ab ullo quidquam, nec minui potest: quia nisi una est, fides non est." Serm. 24, 6, *in Nativ. Domini*, PL 54, 207.

³⁶ "Connexio totius corporis unam sanitatem, unam pulchritudinem facit; et haec connexio totius quidem corporis unanimi-
tatem requirit, sed praecipue exigit concordiam sacerdotum. Quibus cum dignitas sit communis, non est tamen ordo generalis: quoniam et inter beatissimos apostolos in similitudine honoris fuit discretio potestatis; et cum omnium par esset electio, uni tamen datum est ut caeteris praeemineret." Ep. 14, 11, *ad Anas-tasium, episc. Thessal.* PL 54, 676.

³⁷ "De toto mundo unus Petrus eligitur, qui et universarum gentium vocationi, et omnibus apostolis, cunctisque Ecclesiae Patribus praeponatur: ut quamvis in populo Dei multi sacerdotes sint multique pastores, omnes tamen proprie regat Petris, quos principaliter regit et Christus. Magnum et mirabile, dilectissimi, huic viro consortium potentiae suae tribuit divina dignatio; et si quid cum eo commune caeteris voluit esse principibus, numquam nisi per ipsum dedit quid quid alis non negavit." Serm. 4, 2, *de natali ipsius*, PL 54, 149-150.

³⁸ "Transivit quidem etiam in alios apostolos ius potestatis istius (hoc est, ligandi atque solvendi) et ad omnes Ecclesiae principes decreti huius constitutio commeavit; sed non frustra uni commendatur, quod omnibus intimetur. Petro enim ideo hoc singulariter creditur, quia cunctis Ecclesiae rectoribus Petri forma praeponitur." *Ibid.* col. 151; cf. Serm. 83, 2, *in natali s. Petri Apost.* PL 54, 430.

³⁹ "Specialis a Domino Petri cura suscipitur, et pro fide Petri proprie supplicatur, tamquam aliorum status certior sit futurus, si mens principis victa non fuerit. In Petro ergo omnium fortitudo munitur, et divinae gratiae ita ordinatur auxilium, ut firmitas quae per Christum Petro tribuitur, per Petrum apostolis confertur." Serm. 4, 3, PL 54, 151-152; cf. Serm. 83, 2, PL 54, 451.

⁴⁰ "Non est itaque nobis praesumptuosa festivitas qua suscepti sacerdotii diem divini muneris memores honoramus; quandoquidem pie et veraciter confitemur, quod opus ministerii nostri in omnibus quae recte agimus, Christus exsequitur; et non in nobis, qui sine illo nihil possumus, sed in ipso, qui possibilitas nostra est, gloriamur." Serm. 5, 4, *de natali ipsius*, PL 54, 154.

⁴¹ Cf. Serm. 3, 4, *de nat. ipsius*, PL 54, 147.

⁴² "Si quid itaque a nobis recte agitur, recteque discernitur, si quid a misericordia Dei quotidianis supplicationibus obtinetur, illius est operum atque meritorum, eius in sede sua vivit potestas et excellit auctoritas." Serm. 3, 3, *de nat. ipsius*, PL 54, 146; cf. Serm. 83, 3, *in nat. S. Petri Apost.* PL 54, 402.

⁴³ Ep. 30, *ad Concil. Milev.* PL 20, 590.

⁴⁴ Ep. 13, *ad Rufum episc. Thessaliae*, 11 mart. 422, in C. Silva-Tarouca S. I. *Epistolarum Romanorum Pontificum collect. Thessal. Romae* 1937, p. 27.

⁴⁵ "Curam quam universis Ecclesiis principaliter ex divina institutione debemus." Ep. 14, 1, *ad Anastasium, episcop. Thessal.* PL 54, 668.

⁴⁶ "Isti enim sunt viri per quos tibi Evangelium Christi, Roma, resplenduit. . . Isti sunt qui te ad hanc gloriam provexerunt, ut gens sancta, populus electus, civitas sacerdotalis et regia, per sacram beati Petri sedem caput orbis effecta, latius praesideres religione divina quam dominatione terrena. Quamvis enim multis aucta victoriis ius imperii tui terra marique protuleris, minus tamen est quod tibi bellicus labor subdidit, quam quod pax Christiana subiecit." Serm. 82, 1, *in nat. Apost. Petri et Pauli*, PL 54, 422-423.

⁴⁷ "Vos ergo, dilecti Deo et apostolico testimonio comprobati, quibus beatus apostolus Paulus, doctor gentium, dicit: *Quoniam fides vestra annuntiatur in universo mundo* custodite in vobis quod tantum praedicatorem agnoscitis sensisse de vobis. Nemo vestrum efficiatur huius laudis alienus, ut quos per tot saecula docente Spiritu Sancto haeresis nulla violavit, ne Eutychnae quidem impietatis possint maculare contagia." Serm. 86, 3, *tract contra haer. Eutychnis*. PL 54, 467.

⁴⁸ Mansi, *Concil. ampliss. collect.* VI, p. 913.

⁴⁹ Ep. 100, 3, *Marciani imper ad Leonem, episc. Romae*, PL 54, 972; Ep. 77, 1, *Pulcheriae aug. ad Leonem, episc. Romae*, PL 54, 907.

⁵⁰ Ep. 52, 1, *Theodoreti episc. ad Leonem, episc. Romae*, PL 54, 847.

⁵¹ *Menaia tou holou eniautou* III, Roma 1896 p. 612.

⁵² Migne, PG 117, 319.

⁵³ 1 *Tim.* 2, 5.

⁵⁴ Cf. Conc. Vat. I, Sess. III, *cap. 3 de fide*.

⁵⁵ *Heb.* 13, 20.

⁵⁶ Cf. *John* 21, 15-17.

57 Cf. *Advers. haeres.* 1, III, c. 2, n. 2, *PG* 7, 848.

58 *Ibid.*

59 *John* 17, 21.

60 Cf. *Io.* 11, 42.

61 *Ibid.* 10, 16.

62 Cf. *1 Tim.* 2, 5; *I John* 2, 1.

63 *Ps.* 132, 1.

64 Cf. *Phil.* 1, 27.

65 "State igitur in spiritu catholicae veritatis, et apostolicam cohortationem ministerio nostri oris accipite." *Ep.* 50, 2 *ad Constantinopolitanos*, *PL* 54, 843.

66 Cf. *John* 17:11, 20, 23.

67 *Col.* 3, 14.

68 Cf. *2 Cor.* 6, 16.

69 "Cum igitur et omnes simul et singuli quique fidelium unum idemque Dei templum sint, sicut perfectum hoc in universis, ita perfectum devet esse in singulis: quia etsi non eadem est membrorum omnium pulchritudo, nec in tanta varietate partium meritorum potest esse parilitas, communionem tamen obtinet decoris connexio charitatis. In sancto enim amore consortes, etiamsi non iisdem utuntur gratiae beneficiis, gaudent tamen invicem bonis suis, et non potest ab eis extraneum esse quod diligunt, quia incremento ditescunt proprio, qui profectu laetantur alieno." *Serm.* 48, 1, *de Quadrag.* *PL* 54, 298-299.

70 "Tunc fit potentissimus Dei populus, quando in unitatem sanctae oboedientiae omnium fidelium corda conveniunt, et in castris militiae christianae similis ex omni parte praeparatio, et eadem est ubique munto." *Ep.* 22, 2, *PL* 54, 441-442.

71 "Quia tunc opera diaboli potentius destruuntur, cum ad Dei proximique dilectionem hominum corda revocantur." *Ep.* 95, 2, *ad Pulcheriam august.* *PL* 54, 943.



LEO

MAGNVS