

*OPENING OF THE  
YEAR OF FAITH  
IN THE  
ARCHDIOCESE OF  
LIVERPOOL*



**Evening Prayer at Saint Bede's, Widnes  
Feast of St Wilfrid, 11 October 2012  
To Mark The 50th Anniversary of the  
Opening of the Second Vatican Council by Pope John XXIII  
and the Inauguration of this Year of Faith.**

**Reflection by The Most Rev Patrick A Kelly**

I could offer a series of authentic and to some extent illuminating anecdotes about the Second Vatican Council as I experienced those days in Rome. But I am convinced something more substantial is right and fitting. In particular I hope I may place that Council in a wide context so as to appreciate, as far as we can discern in the days entrusted to us, where it belongs in the story of the growth of wisdom and understanding in the Lord's Spirit guided people.

I must begin on 11 October 431 and in Ephesus on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. On that day, after decades of searching, arguing, passionate debate Pope Saint Celestine I and the Bishops affirmed: John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born: but John the Baptist was not the Holy Spirit: Elizabeth carried in her womb and gave birth to John the Baptist in whom the Holy Spirit dwelt; but she was not the Mother of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit when he was in the horrendous prison of Machaerus and beheaded there; but the Holy Spirit was not in prison nor was the Holy Spirit beheaded.

When I name John the Baptist and the Holy Spirit I name 2: when I name John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit and Elizabeth I name 3.

By contrast when I name Jesus and the Word who is God, I name one. It was not just that Word of God dwelt in the one in Mary's Womb in the one to whom Mary gave birth. The child in her Womb is the Word, the Son of God, is God: Mary is Theotokos, Mother of God. And on 11 October at the Synod about the Word of the Lord in the Life and Mission of the church Pope Benedict gave a reflection on the utter truth of that title and explained how it undermined all accounts of God as an unmoved mover.

Again, it is not just that one in whom God dwelt was arrested, scourged, crowned, crucified, and died: God was arrested, scourged, crowned, crucified, and died. As in Edwin Muir's great Good Friday poem the Killing the answer is "Yes" to the question: 'Did a God indeed in dying, cross my path that day?' Or in Godspel: when Jesus crucified is portrayed in fidelity to the cry Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani, cries out: O God I'm dying, the crowd truthfully respond: Oh God, you are dying. When I name Jesus and the Word I name 1, not 2; when I name Mary, Jesus and the Word I name 2.

That conviction so filled hearts and minds in wonder and thanksgiving that a risk emerged of the fact that Jesus was utterly human being overwhelmed. Or as someone once put it: losing his humanity in the cloud of the Ascension. A strange word even emerged: Theandric to describe Our Lord's thinking praying, relating, feeling, and judging: the "The" bit from the Greek word for God, and the "Andric" from the word for Man, like anthropology. But the emphasis was on the "The" bit: it was more divine than human and his feelings, praying, relating, deciding, and doing not really human at all. Putting divine and human together you might a word like "div"- "an", where the "div" part from divine, would always carry more weight and overwhelm the "an" bit from human.

And so in 451 at a place called Chalcedon, with Leo the Great as Pope the Bishops had to meet again. And in the strongest words open to them affirmed Jesus, utterly human, not just before his Ascension, but now, in glory like us. And since the word One had been so powerful, "One Lord Jesus Christ", not two, like John the Baptist and the Holy Spirit, but one, Jesus and the Word, after an often furious debate they deliberately used the word "Two" about him: he is One Lord; but there is a Twoness about him as well: no swallowing up what is human when the divine comes utterly close by. And a series of 4 adverbs was brought into play to try to do justice to what they were convinced had to be absolutely clear if we were to live in the full light and wonder of the Word made flesh, like us in all things but sin. They affirmed Our One Lord Jesus Christ, the only

begotten, is in two natures and the two 1. without confusion, 2. without one changing the other, 3. without separation and 4. without division.

During this summer I did my best to read a book about Physics and learnt at least this: my whole way of observing, understanding, describing has to change to do justice to how things really are. My usual comfortable way of understanding and appropriating and speaking had to be shattered to be ready for the world of as Physics now know it to be. Physics rejoices in stretched minds, and so wider hearts too. A bit like the day when a teaching was given: new wine needs new wine skins. Mark 2.22.

I must invite you to do an experiment to show the best way I have found to do justice to those four adverbs: get two glasses, one filled with red juice, say cranberry; the other with water and a third empty glass. You can see: the juice and the water are not confused, not changing each other. But they are obviously separated and divided. So to do justice to the other two adverbs we must get rid of the glass around the juice and water which keeps them divided; to avoid a mess we pour the two liquids into the third glass: all division has gone, all separation, but now they are totally mixed up and changed: we no longer have a Twoness, water and juice but have watery juice/juicy water.

It took 600 years to begin to work out some way to find new wine skins to cope with these indisputable facts: Jesus is One, but there is Twoness about him.

And on 11 October 50 years ago that Twoness began to touch the minds, hearts, ways, decisions, and attitudes across the whole breadth of life as a Catholic where typically the Oneness had engaged our minds and hearts and attitudes more powerfully. .

As we look at examples of this, please keep in mind those 600 years; it is early days since the Second Vatican Council.

We begin with our understanding and approach to the Bible. Pope Leo XIII, like so many had pondered, explored, rejoiced in the fact that the Scriptures are divinely inspired. Those who serve us as readers rightly declare: The Word of the Lord: and we respond: Thanks be to God. Vatican II gave us as the decree *Dei Verbum*, the Word of God, which must underpin all its work, since the first question has to be: where do we receive, discern, and discover what God is saying. *Dei Verbum* stressed: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, Jude are authors: the Holy Spirit is not a dictatorial dove sitting on their shoulder; they use

their talents of imagination, understanding, mastery of Greek: these books are divine and human. So, you must come to their books with reverence for the Word of God, but also full of inquisitiveness as to what made the various authors write as they did; what did they give to and receive from each other: what was going on around them when they wrote? It needs hard headed, forensic examination. The Word of One God; but there is a Twoness. And the Holy Spirit and the human authors must not be confused, allowed to impose on each other, but nor must they be separated or divided.

In 2008 Pope Benedict called a Synod of Bishops to revisit again the issue of the Word of the Lord in the life and mission of the Church. The most difficult debate was how to hold together the Oneness and the Twoness: the debate was going nowhere and the Pope intervened. As he finished an Anglican, a great scholar of scriptures said to me: “Patrick, why do not we just all go home and leave it all to him”. In his Letter *Verbum Domini*, The Word of the Lord, you will find this tantalising unavoidable question addressed from section 34 onwards; you will note: most of the footnotes are to his own intervention that evening among us all. No one else cast much light on the question. But he did not, and remember those 600 years, work it all out: he showed us how to be open to all the searching that must go on to do justice to this wonderful gift, divine and human.

A second example: for very good reasons on 11 October 1551 Bishops gathered with Pope Julius III proclaimed the truth about our Lord’s presence in the consecrated elements. They did not give much time to the place of reading from scripture or what is bread and wine. And we may fittingly sum up what they taught in this way: when it comes to the consecrated bread and wine, Jesus could not be more present if he tried. And that is glorious, liberating, challenging truth: it means, among so much else, Our Lord is giving himself totally to the greatest saint among us and the one hanging on by their finger tips. It is no distraction at least sometimes to look around and realise: the Lord has given himself equally to each and every one of us: how then should we relate to each other, who through the Body of Christ become the Body of Christ: and in that Body “the weaker members are indispensable.” I Cor 12.22. And that is why we must be: patient and kind, not jealous or boastful, not arrogant or rude, not insist on our own way, not irritable or resentful. cf I Cor 13

Then on 17 September 1562, with Pope Pius IV, and just notice how drawn out that Council was, it taught about the Mass as sacrifice, the Mass as arising, through and with and in the Lord, to the Father: the

vertical dimension, if you like, focussed on One God. And the assurance is proclaimed: we are so caught up into the praying, thanksgiving, pleading, adoring, self-sacrifice unto death of Our Lord that it is a statement of fact: “Through him and with him and in him, O God Almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all glory and honour IS yours for ever and ever.” And we respond: Amen: that Amen does not mean: please let this be so; but declares: It is accomplished.

Since there can be confusion on this point it is worth noting what the Council of Trent decide about the use of other languages and not just Latin: “Even if the Mass contains much teaching of the faithful people, it has not seemed expeditious to the Fathers that the Mass should regularly be celebrated in the vernacular. . . . .Therefore. . . .the Holy Synod mandates pastors and all those who entrusted with the care of souls, that frequently within the celebration of Mass, either themselves or through others, from the texts which are read at Mass, they give an exposition and set out the mystery of this most holy sacrifice, especially on Sundays and feast Days.”

But the Council of Trent said next to nothing about the Mass as a gathering, a coming together as one around one table, about what we might call the horizontal aspect: the many of us. Then on 8 December 1962 the Bishops, now with Pope John XXIII gave us the challenge of the decree on the Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium. That day I was in bed with ‘flu, and unusually for those days, was allowed a radio in my room. I will never forget the spontaneous applause as it was announced that the Decree had been affirmed by something like 2000 yes votes and 3 no. It was for me the Acts of the Apostles again: “It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. Acts.” 15.28

And, at a very critical moment of the implementation of the decree, the Great Pope Paul VI insisted that the preparation, presentation, offering of the bread and wine should not be allowed to disappear but be given a clear place and significance. So the most human was kept for us: for in truth: In bread we bring you Lord, our bodies' labour. And it is not at all unfair, to put it like this: building on the teaching of Pope Saint Pius X, the Second Vatican Council affirmed and set clearly before us to be appreciated and reflected in our celebrations of the Mass and in all our worship, that which is human, horizontal. Actions and words must profoundly open up what is taking place in our midst, but the fact that always we are meeting the One who is, as Saint Thomas declared “My Lord and My God,” we will often need spaciousness of poetry and images that take us into the fullness of life, for it is about the length and breadth

and length and height of the table of the Lord's Word and the Lord's Body and Blood set before all. In many ways and again keeping in mind that 600 years, we need not get too excited if our first translations were a bit light weight and curiously ungenerous in their expectation of how many appreciate the joy and light in poetry and symbol. So we have our new translation, which the more I seek to let it form my pray and open my heart the more I find the simplicity of poetry which communicates before it is understood.

The One and the Many: three final examples: on 18 July 1870, with Pope Pius IX the Bishops, after some very lively debates, and with quite a few still not convinced at the final vote, unlike the majorities typical at Vatican II, set out the teaching about the Pope the One Universal Bishop, the One who for our sake, that we may walk confidently in unity and securely assured of the presence of that "Holy Spirit who will guide us into all truth," John 16.13 at very clearly defined times, for the sake of our unity and assurance can set out what is the truth of God, with no danger of error or leading us astray.

Very soon, political upheaval across Europe, and Italy in particular, made it necessary for all the bishops to go home, leaving the Pope as he said; infallible but broke.

In the Second Vatican Council that One was proclaimed as not to be separated or divided from the mission entrusted to the Bishops, but there had to be no confusion, no alteration, no overwhelming of one by the other.

The mindset at that time rejoiced that the fullness of what the Lord would give us in word and sacrament is found within the Roman Catholic Church and among the gifts meant for all is that of a Pope. Our relationship to others was understood as: we must give: they will receive from us. Again, it was simple: one setting where life in abundance is found. But the Second Vatican Council introduced a new and complicating word: dialogue: we relate by both giving and receiving. On another occasion, the rich experience of Pope John XXIII before he was elected to be Pope could be explored helping to explain this new awareness. First of all dialogue as an accurate word to describe how we relate, in the words of Pope Benedict's first homily as Bishop of Rome "to all those who have been reborn in the sacrament of Baptism, but are not yet in full communion with us." And that we saw reflected especially when he took part in Evensong at Westminster Abbey. But the dialogue went further: again, from that same homily: "you my brothers and sisters

of the Jewish people, to whom we are joined by a great shared spiritual heritage, rooted in God's irrevocable promises." And so there was the meeting at Twickenham with the Chief Rabbi and many men and women of different religions, a meeting placed in the context of Dialogue. And I find myself appointed by the Holy Father to be a member of a Pontifical Council named: the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue.

And it always seems to me the assurance that this shall be the way is found in that meeting and conversation between Our Lord and a Syro-Phoenician woman, typical of his meeting with other pagans as they open his heart and mind to faith found outside God's people Israel. Mark 7 24-30 Matthew 15 21-28 cf Matthew 8 5-13 and Acts 10. 1-11.18.

We begin to see that the way to the fullness of life and truth and light and fidelity is inseparable from the gift of a Spirit driving us to be open to light and truth and wisdom and concern wherever it is found. It is not by being locked within ourselves but by a Spirit-given capacity for fellowship, communion, conversation that life in abundance is offered to us.

And from that emerges the Pastoral Constitution: The church in the Modern World. *Gaudium et Spes*, *Luctus et Dolores*: the Joys and Hopes, the Grief and Sorrows. And you will go a long way to see that Decree embodied as searchingly and with so much to challenge and demanding so much energy, engagement and renewal as in Pope Benedict's Address in Westminster Hall. I will never forget how he bowed to the assembled civic leaders as he finished his address: the herald of the word of God and the world: not to be confused with one another, nor one to seek to overwhelm the other, but never to be separated or divided.

In 1956 I was advised by the then Jack Brewer, later to be Bishop of Lancaster, to read the works of Abbot Anscar Vonier. They proved to be for me an opening of mind and heart and attitudes to what was to be the joy and challenge of a General Council. I end with words from him which proved a foundation to live what God gave us through the man sent from God whose name was John;

*"The emotion of the pilgrim who sits by the Lake of Galilee and says to himself with such absolute conviction, 'On these waters Christ sailed!' is but a terrestrial counterpart of that much vaster astonishment that must fill the angelic mind when it looks at mankind: 'This is the race out of which there came God!' There is a quickening of soul and body in Christ's faithful through His grace*

*that makes of such hero-worship a unique thing, a life-giving thing, Christ is indeed our ideal, but He is also our life. Yet even as an ideal, merely as the raising up of one human individual to an infinite altitude, Hypostatic Unions ought to colour with optimism the whole outlook of mankind.*

*To ignore in practice the fact that we are dealing with creatures who, by the very laws of their nature, are the brothers of God, is the cruellest of all lapses of memory. However mean my neighbour may be, Christ's Personality is vast enough to reach out to him; just as the lowest of God's creatures may bask in the sun. that some or even many human beings have a special kind of relationship with Christ, through their baptism, does not supersede the more elementary fact that all men are of the family of which God came. It may even be said that Christ's activities, of whatever kind, in the world and on the world, are intended as means to win man to the practical realisation that He their God is amongst them...*

*The glories of the Hypostatic Union are intensely human in their aim. Hypostatic Union is not a prodigy that appears in the spiritual firmament or its own sake; the blade, and the ear, and the ripe fruit, happy children and old men basking in the sunlight here on earth, make of the immensity of the sun a quite proportionate means to an end. Quite simply, then, if my mind delights in the sublime verities of Hypostatic Union, whilst I regard and treat my neighbour as though he were not God's brother too, the great mystery is for me but barren speculation. There is endless food for thought in the fact that the great mystery of god, the Incarnation, the secret hidden in God from the beginning, should be indissolubly associated with Simon the fisherman, with Mary the woman with the seven devils, with the Samaritan woman who had five husbands and a sixth who was not hers. They are figures and types of the humanity which will be Christ's conquest. 'Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well...There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water....Jesus answered and said to her: If thou didst know the gift of God and who He is that saith to thee: Give Me to drink; those perhaps wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water....And immediately His disciples came. And they wondered that He talked with the women. Yet no man said: What seekest thou? Or: Why talkest thou with her?.... I have meat to eat which you know now....My meat is to do the will of Him and sent Me, that I may perfect His work....Behold*



*say to you: Lift up your eyes, and see the countries; for they are white already to harvest.'*

*Sun of Justice, Word Incarnate, Thine is the blade, Thine is the ear, Thine is the ripe corn in the ear. Grant me to love Thy harvest, for which Thou shinest in the heavens to the glory of Thy Hypostatic. Unless; keep my feet from trampling on the rising blade, whilst my intellect gazes at Thy beauty in the blue firmaments, keep my hands from plucking ruthlessly the ear that is whitening, whilst I walk through life full of the rapturous thoughts of Thy being God;. Make me to understand that Thou didst become Son for the sake of the blade, that Thou didst seest the possibility of a true worshipper of the Father where I harden my heart and turn away my eyes. May my mind return thanks to Thee for the delights of the thought that Thou art one with the Father, by generously accepting my oneness with my brother in Thee; and let me make some return for my glorious freedom to go in and to go out to the infinitude of Thou most sweet Personality by cheerfully accepting Thy great law, O Thou most long-suffering of Friends, - 'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so you shall fulfil the law of Christ.'"*

*(The Personality of Christ 1914)*