



Pope Francis landed in Geneva Thursday for a day-trip aimed at bolstering ecumenical relations, saying off the bat that division among Christians is borne from worldliness, and Christ must be prioritized over any differences that might get in the way of unity.

In his first official speech after touching down, the pope said Christians are called to walk together along the path of the Spirit, which means “rejecting worldliness” and “opting for a mindset of service and growing in forgiveness.”

“It means playing our part in history but in God’s good time, not letting ourselves be caught up in the whirlwind of corruption but advancing calmly on the way whose signpost is the one commandment: ‘ou shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“We are called, together, to walk along this path,” he said, noting that walking together requires perpetual conversion and “the renewal of our way of thinking, so that it can conform to that of the Holy Spirit.”

It could be said that to walk in this way is to “operate at a loss,” he said, “since it does not adequately protect the interests of individual communities, often closely linked to ethnic identity or split along party lines, whether ‘conservative’ or ‘progressive.’”

The pope then pointed to St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians, in which the apostle told the community that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

He also referred to the passage in St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, in which the apostle pointed to divisions in the Christian community of Corinth, saying “each of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.' Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

What modern Christians are asked do, Francis said, is “to belong to Jesus before belonging to Apollos or Cephas; to belong to Christ before being 'Jew or Greek'; to belong to the Lord before identifying with right or left; to choose, in the name of the Gospel, our brother or our sister over ourselves.”

“In the eyes of the world, this often means operating at a loss,” he said, calling the ecumenical movement “a great enterprise operating at a loss.”

However, this loss “is evangelical,” he said, and quoted Jesus' words from the Gospel when he told his disciples that “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.”

“To save only what is ours is to walk according to the flesh; to lose everything in the footsteps of Jesus is to walk in the Spirit,” he said. “Only in this way does the Lord's vineyard bear fruit.”

Pope Francis spoke to participants in an ecumenical prayer gathering during his June 21 visit to Geneva for the 70th anniversary of the World Council of Churches. Founded in 1948, the World Council of Churches (WCC) is a global fellowship of churches seeking to foster unity among different Christian confessions and has some 348 members worldwide.

Members are present in 110 countries and represent over 500 million Christians, including Orthodox, Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran and Methodist churches, as well as many

Reformed, United and Independent churches.

While the majority of the founding members came from Europe and North America, currently the bulk of the WCC membership is in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East and the Pacific. The Holy See is not a member of the WCC, but it is an observer, and routinely sends representatives to the organization's meetings.

Francis' homily during the prayer gathering was the first official speech of his daytrip to Geneva. He spoke at the WCC headquarters after holding a private meeting with President of the Swiss Confederation, Alain Berset.

In his address, the pope said Christian divisions have historically arisen because “ a worldly mindset has seeped in” at their root.

What happened, he said, is that “self-concern took priority over concern for Christ,” and once this took place, devil “had no difficulty in separating us, because the direction we were taking was that of the flesh, not of the Spirit.”

Even certain attempts to end these divisions in the past have “failed miserably because they were chiefly inspired by a worldly way of thinking,” he said, noting that the ecumenical movement “came about as a grace of the Holy Spirit.”

“Ecumenism made us set out in accordance with Christ’s will, and it will be able to progress if, following the lead of the Spirit, it constantly refuses to withdraw into itself.”

Looking at relations between modern Christian churches and the slew of issues which often stand in the way of full unity, Francis said the current experience is akin to that of the early Christian communities in Galatia.

“How difficult it is to overcome hard feelings and to foster communion! How hard it is to leave behind centuries-old disagreements and mutual recriminations!” he said.

At times, it is “more formidable to withstand the subtle temptation to join others, to walk together, but for the sake of satisfying some partisan interest.” However, this is not the mindset of an apostle, but is the attitude of Judas, who walked alongside Jesus, “but for his own purposes.”

The 70th anniversary of the WCC, Pope Francis said, is a call to strengthen the steps toward ecumenism that have already been taken.

He said Christians should not cease their quest for unity when faced with continual differences, and nor should they be overcome by weariness or a “lack of enthusiasm.”

“Our differences must not be excuses. Even now we can walk in the Spirit: we can pray, evangelize and serve together,” he said. “This is possible and it is pleasing to God! Walking, praying and working together: this is the great path that we are called to follow.”

The aim of this path is unity, and the opposite is a path to division which leads to “conflict and breakup,” he said, stressing that the lack of unity among Christians is not only “openly contrary to the will of Christ,” but is also “a scandal to the world and harms the most holy of causes: the preaching of the Gospel to every creature.”

The Lord, he said, “asks us for unity; our world, torn by all too many divisions that affect the most vulnerable, begs for unity.”

And for Christians, to walk together is not merely a “ ploy to strengthen our own positions,” but is rather an act of obedience to Jesus and his love for the world, Francis said, and closed by praying that God would help Christians to “walk together all the more

resolutely in the ways of the Spirit.”

“May the Cross guide our steps, because there, in Jesus, the walls of separation have already been torn down and all enmity overcome.”