

Pope says in praying for unity Christians identify divisions

VATICAN CITY – In praying for Christian unity, those who follow Jesus recognize their divisions prevent others from believing in the Gospel message of peace, love and salvation, Pope Benedict XVI said.

“In common prayer, Christian communities place themselves together before the Lord and, becoming aware of the contradictions arising from their divisions, they demonstrate their desire to obey his will, relying on his almighty assistance,” the pope said Jan. 23 at his weekly general audience.

As is customary during the Jan. 18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the pope dedicated his entire audience talk to ecumenism.

Pope Benedict said that common prayer is not a strategy for publicizing the need for Christian unity, “but is an expression of the faith that unites all the disciples of Christ,” who had prayed that his followers would be one.

“It is the awareness of our human limits that leads us to abandon ourselves with trust into the hands of the Lord,” he said.

At the Last Supper Jesus prayed that his disciples would be one so that the world might believe, Pope Benedict said.

“That the world might believe – today we strongly sense the realism of these words. The world suffers from the absence of God, from the inaccessibility of God. It wants to know the face of God. But how can it recognize the face of God in the face of Christ if we Christians are divided, if one teaches against another, if one stands against another?” the pope asked.

While dialogue, meetings and planning are necessary, he said, “it is also evident we cannot obtain this unity through our own efforts. What we can obtain is our own openness and capacity” to welcome the unity which God will give.

“This is the meaning of prayer: to open our hearts, to create openness in us, to open the path to Christ,” he said. “Only in converting to Christ, this common gazing upon Christ, can we find the gift of unity.”

Pope Benedict ended his talk by praying, “May the Virgin Mary, mother of the church, obtain for all the children of her divine son the possibility of living in peace and mutual love so as to give a convincing witness of reconciliation to the world and make the face of God, the face of Christ, accessible.”

The Vatican text of the pope’s remarks in English is available online at: https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20080123_en.html.