

## REMEMBERING VATICAN II: Week 1

**This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. The Council had a profound influence on the Church in our time. On Thursday 11 October at 6.00 pm, there will be a special celebration of Eucharist in St Patrick's Church, Church Hill (near Wynard) to mark the 50th anniversary.** Everybody is welcome! **Bishop Geoffrey Robinson** will be the principal celebrant and homilist.

Over the coming months we will also recall some of the key documents that came from the Council. This week we remember two important documents. The Latin name given to a Church document is usually taken from the opening words.

*Gaudium et spes* (Joy and Hope), The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, is one of the four Constitutions of Vatican II. Promulgated on 7 December 1965, it seeks to establish for the Church a new kind of presence in the world, one based on service and dialogue. It encouraged Catholics to work together with people of good will in society for the good of all people.

*Unitatis redintegratio* (The Restoration of Unity), the Decree on Ecumenism, was promulgated on 21 November 1964. The document opened the door for official dialogue between the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches. The restoration of unity among all Christians was one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Much has been achieved in the past 50 years through dialogue and shared prayer but more is still to be done before Christian Unity becomes a

### Week 2

This week we recall *Dei Verbum*, the **Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation**, promulgated on 18 November 1965.

Since the time of the Reformation, the Catholic Church had been criticized for not taking Sacred Scripture seriously. The general view was that Protestants read the Bible while Catholic ignored the Word of God. *Dei Verbum* put an end to that criticism by reclaiming for Catholics the centrality of the Scriptures in the Christian life. It drew on the ground-breaking encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943), which gave permission to Catholic scripture scholars to include historical criticism and other modern methods and insights in their study of the various books of the Bible. *Dei Verbum* also urged all members of the Church to read the Bible as a source for prayer and the spiritual life, something that we now take for granted.

**The Lectionary** (the book containing the readings used at Mass): One very obvious consequence of the new emphasis on the Sacred Scripture was the

revision of the place of the Word of God in the Mass and the celebration of other Sacraments. In 1969, as a result of the reforms introduced by Vatican II, a new and much expanded Lectionary was introduced. It included a three year cycle of readings for Sundays. Previously the same readings were proclaimed every year. The revised Lectionary also included readings from the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). We still follow those readings today.

### **The Flavour of Vatican II**

The Council met in St Peter's Basilica, Rome, in four, three-month sessions from 1962 to 1965. John XXIII died after the first session; his successor, Paul VI, continued the Council. Attending the Council were 2,300 Bishops, a varying number of experts (periti), observers from 17 Orthodox Churches and Protestant denominations, up to 100 representatives from other Christian communities - and from September, 1964, 23 women. Also attending were three future Popes: Bishop Albino Luciani (Pope John Paul I); Bishop Karol Wojtyla ( Pope John Paul II); and theological consultant, Father Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI.

Unlike earlier Councils, Vatican II did not meet to define dogma or oppose heresy. Rather, its aim - and its language - was pastoral. In Pope Paul's first address, to the second session of the Council on 29 September 1963, he stated that the aim of the Council was:

- . to define more fully the nature of the Church and the role of the bishop;
- . to renew the Church;
- . to restore unity among all Christians, including seeking pardon for Catholic contributions to separation;
- . and to start a dialogue with the contemporary world.

Week 3

### **Vatican II and Liturgical Reform**

Liturgical changes were the first fruits of Vatican II and even fifty years later are the main reform many Catholics associate with the Council. The momentum for change had grown with the liturgical movement in Europe in the early 1900s, the encyclicals of Pope Pius XII, and four international liturgical congresses held in the 1950s. That movement prepared the ground and sowed the seeds that would bear fruit in the Vatican Council.

***Sacrosanctum Concilium, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy***, (proclaimed 4 December 1963) called for the reform of the liturgy, including

the rites of the Church for the celebration of the Eucharist (the Mass) and the other sacraments. The most obvious change was permission to celebrate in the language of the people (the vernacular).

Sacred Scripture was restored to its place as the principal source for all liturgical renewal. The whole tradition of the Church going back to the early centuries and the writings of the early Fathers of the Church became another key source for the renewal of the liturgy.