Do justice...love kindness...walk humbly with your God.

Today I want first to express my thanks to the Dean and Chapter and to Bishop Christopher for inviting me to join you at Evensong and to preach on this Sunday during the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity. I also thank Canon Garry Byrne and the Roman Catholic clergy and parishioners of the city for the fellowship and friendship that they have deepened with the Cathedral over many years. Whatever the Christian family to which we belong we are already united as brothers and sisters because we have all received baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet we also realise that through our baptism the Lord challenges us to contribute to the fulfilment of his prayer that they may all be one.

It seems particularly significant at the outset of this year when we shall commemorate the centenary of the First World War that we gather in this Cathedral with its historic and universally recognised ministry of prayer for peace and reconciliation in the world. The work of Christian unity is directly linked with the search for justice and peace that lies at the heart of the Church's mission. The Church is called to demonstrate that unanimity — a oneness of soul — that characterises the Kingdom of God and lies at the service of the world.

In his recent Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium — The Joy of the Gospel — Pope Francis said:

Commitment to ecumenism responds to the prayer of the Lord Jesus that “they may all be one”. The credibility of the Christian message would be much greater if Christians could overcome their divisions...We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God’s face. Trusting others is an art and peace is an art. Jesus told us: “Blessed are the peacemakers”. In taking up this task, also among ourselves, we fulfil the ancient prophecy: “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares”. In this perspective, ecumenism can be seen as a contribution to the unity of the human family.

The prophet Micah urges us to live our lives of faith with integrity, so that what we profess with our mouths is reflected in our actions. He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God? Part of that humility is our recognition that something is lacking in our Christian communities for as long as we are not fully at one with each other in our belief and witness to Christ.

So it is that our prayer for the unity of the Church, reflecting the prayer of Jesus himself in St John’s Gospel that they may all be one, is an authentic expression of our Christian identity according to the different confessional families to which we belong. For me it is authentically Catholic to work and pray for the Church’s unity, it is not an option. If I neglect to do this, or I am indifferent, there is something missing from my life and my journey of faith as a Catholic.

St Luke’s account of the happenings along the road to Emmaus in our Second Lesson tonight remind us that we are constantly on a journey, a pilgrimage together which has certain characteristics. Biblical scholars have highlighted the key moments in this extraordinary meeting between the two disciples and
the risen Christ so soon after the resurrection. As they walk along side by side we may hear echoes of Micah’s *walk humbly with your God*. 

The first thing to strike us is that the disciples were not aware that it was Jesus who had come to walk by their side – *but their eyes were kept from recognising him*. Their outlook on life was limited, blinkered, and it is only when they respond to the questions posed by Jesus that they begin to reflect on what they have experienced. This is moment of repentance.

Repentance is a change of outlook that brings renewal – it opens us to the grace of redemption won for us by the death and resurrection of Christ. In Christian Unity Week we once again set our course along the shared pathway of faith to prepare and steady ourselves for the long pilgrimage leading us towards the gift of new life in the risen Lord. For that pilgrimage to be fruitful it has to engage us as Christians and Churches together, not in a superficial sense but at the deepest level of our being – it has to be truly transforming.

The second key moment along the road to Emmaus comes through exploring the Scriptures in the light of Christ’s presence. *Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.* We are called to unite ourselves around the Word of God and to allow its powerful message to transform our lives and our Churches.

In *Evangelii Gaudium - The Joy of the Gospel* – Pope Francis also recognises the unity that comes from our focus on the Word of God and our need to share our insights with each other:

*How many important things unite us! If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us...Through an exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness.*

The Word of God reveals the transformation to which we ourselves are called in Christ. Time and again our Christian faith reminds us that this invitation is to enter into and share the life of God, not merely to look on and wonder at it. We are captured by the vision of God’s goodness, truth and beauty and drawn to it as our own fulfilment and destiny, and that destiny is shaped by the character of the relationship we have with God in Christ and with one another.

The third key moment in the Gospel story is the moment of recognition when the disciples’ *eyes were opened and they recognised him*. They understood what they had experienced and, although the day was almost over, *that same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem*. When we encounter Christ together we too find that we see things differently and we want to change direction, especially reaching out to those in need around us.

With our shared faith and a renewed focus we need to look at the world – and at this City of Coventry - not chiefly as an enemy that is indifferent or even hostile to the message of the Gospel but as the place where God’s salvation has already reached into people’ lives through the love of his Son Jesus Christ. The Scriptures remind us that *God so loved the world that he sent his only Son* so that we might be healed and saved. As a demonstration of our Christian faith we need above all to find ever fresh ways to show the love of God for the world and this city that he made and cherishes.

The unity that we already enjoy prompts us to remember our brothers and sisters of the suffering Church in the Holy Land and the Middle East. Organisations such as the Friends of the Holy Land can draw together Christians from all our Churches in prayerful and practical support of these ancient Christian communities to whom we owe so much.
One of the challenges we face as Churches in the Midlands is not so much that the truth and beauty of God and the values offered by Christianity are being ignored or rejected, but that our own attempts to express or share our faith fail to move people sufficiently, especially when they see our divisions. Only by allowing ourselves to be transformed together can we hope to give a more credible witness to the Christ who wants to walk beside us.