

*To know God and others we must understand ourselves,  
but to know ourselves we must rely on the help of others.*

There speaks a good Benedictine, Dom Columba Stewart, unwittingly, perhaps, summarising the not-so-recent trend in ecumenism known as ‘receptive ecumenism’ – letting others teach us how to know ourselves better through the sharing of our respective riches. This comes about, primarily, in the experience of encounter, in living life together, or, in the words of Pope Francis:

*I don't believe in a definitive ecumenism, much less do I believe in the ecumenism that as its first step gets us to agree on the theological level. I think that we progress in unity participating together in prayer and works of charity.*

This is Jesus kneeling at the feet of his disciples to teach them what it means to be Christ but it's also the *manner* of whatever we do that matters. Jesus is not kneeling at this disciples' feet in a reluctant show of what it means to be Christian but to convey his true love and respect for them. ‘Look! This is what I can do for you. Now do it for one another’. *We* can allow other traditions to teach us in a similar manner, with joy and wonderment at what they share, at what they know of love which we have yet to learn. This requires great humility and a certain emptiness in order to receive it: that making space for one another of which Catherine Clifford spoke a couple of days ago – to quote her, quoting Pope Francis again :

*To understand one another and to grow in charity and truth, we need to pause, to accept and listen to one another, in this way we already experience unity.*

In this way, we are already one and the theological reflection can come later. It's very similar, I would suggest, to the way in which group psychotherapy works. The work is the group itself: learning to sit and listen; to put aside preconceived notions of one another; to suspend judgement; to receive and then, perhaps, respond, often on an entirely new track, which is teaching something new to all of us. In this space we find ourselves enriched. What a tremendous vision that is for ‘progress’ in the monastic life, too. *Progress as we progress.*

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