

**Sermon given by Fr Nicolas Jouy¹,
Parish Priest of Peronne**
at the
Annual Pilgrimage in honour of St Fursey
Burgh Castle, Saturday 4th October 2008

In France, we have an expression about people who are incomprehensible because they express themselves badly: speaking English like a Spanish cow. Today I am trying to speak English and I hope that you will not be listening to a Spanish cow.

I do not know if jigsaws existed in the time of Jesus and if he would have done them. But today, they seem to me a good parable to express the way we live, and what the dialogue between our churches and ecumenism asks of us.

Let us open together, if you will, the box containing the jigsaw puzzle that is our churches. A jigsaw whose only purpose is to reveal the face of Christ which speaks to the world of God's inexhaustible love.

When we open the box, the first feeling which comes to us is a kind of sadness faced with the variety of pieces which seem made for everything except to go together. What is more, the scale of the work to be done seems disproportionate to the project ahead of us. We are then tempted to close the box, to look at the lid, the picture, and to dream about how things might have been if only.

But it does happen that someone, someone bolder, more visionary will take on the challenge. The box is turned upside down on the table; pieces are spread out and mixed together in a new way. The time comes then to sort them with the fingertips, to be touched by what they say, by what they express, by what they show of the project which they hint at without revealing it.

Step by step, the differences in shape, in pattern, far from keeping them apart, as we thought, harmonize, grow richer, communicate – go together. Step by step, by fitting together, yet retaining their individuality, pieces become links which make it possible to see the outline of the plan, the drawing, the image which they aim to fulfil. Even if we begin with the corners, because it is easier, no piece can claim to be more important than the others. And when we come towards the end of the work, the only pieces which we notice are the ones which are missing. Finally the last piece finds its place then, all disappear, having accomplished their mission, to give way to the entire image, to the completed picture, the revelation of which is their only “raison d'être”.

Our churches are like the pieces in a jigsaw. At first glance, everything seems to conspire to make them irreconcilable: history, traditions, practice, interpretation and sometimes, their claim to contain the entire revelation. The unexpected hand of history and the inexhaustible will of God to see his plan fulfilled has spread them out and mixed them up on the great table of the world. Mixed up, they have learnt to know one another, to reveal their thoughts, to become used to one another. What seemed to be able to do nothing but keep apart, is now revealed, as a link, a bridge. And the wealth of each becomes the treasure of all. The completion of the plan seems still far away, the gaps are still big, gaping in the jigsaw of our churches. But, what we are living today says to us that the gaps are no longer inevitable but a challenge.

We have come together, because we believe in this plan of God, in which each of our churches is involved. Let us pray together as if the realization of this plan depended only on God. Then let us act together as if it depended only on us.

Revealing Christ to the world, Christ the loving face of the Father for each and every one of us, that is the reason for the existence of our churches, that is the project which God entrusts to his Church. May his Holy Spirit help us to be always and with all our strength, servants of this project.

Amen

1. The Fursey Pilgrims first met Fr Jouy while based in Peronne on their Fursey fact-finding tour of the Picardy region in 2003.