

Trinity 17
2021

I take as my text today from St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians:

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be alway acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

Unity — the unity of all things in Jesus Christ. That is the continuing theme in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. We saw it in last Sunday's Epistle, and it continues in the passage appointed for this Sunday.

His conclusion is that it is God's design that there be **unity**; that all people, all nations should become one in Christ.

But where is the unity?

What we see, rather than **unity**, is **disunity** — among nations, and within nations. There is cultural disunity, racial disunity, religious disunity, and even disunity within families. We find that within ourselves, there is disunity as we struggle with good on one side, and evil on the other. Perhaps, it might be a significant factor in the many crises that we Christians and the World face today.

Why are we as Christians so divided; so many denominations and sects, themselves splintered and divided? Indeed, why is the Anglican Church, in particular, long considered one of the three Apostolic Churches, at the forefront of catholic reform, so divided?

Why is the **Continuing Church** so divided in its formidable role as **Preserver of the Faith**?

So, what is this idea, this idea of **unity**, indeed, the unity of all things in Jesus Christ?

In order to come to a better understanding, let's turn our focus to the disunity within the **Church**, and, perhaps, even more concerning, disunity within ourselves; for, within ourselves, we are divided in a struggle between good and evil.

In his Epistle, Paul points out clearly that God sent his Son, Jesus Christ into the world to show us the way to unity, and it is in Jesus Christ, and through him, that we are brought into unity with God, reconciled to our Heavenly Father.

It is the task of the **Church**, indeed, the task of each individual Christian, to be the instrument of our Lord in bringing about a universal reconciliation between individuals, within the world, and with God.

For us as individual Christians, this is a seemingly formidable task without the Love and Grace of God — and we are challenged daily in our lives, in our many relationships to maintain unity, not just unity but a loving unity.

In today's passage, St. Paul lays down the basis of *unity*:

There is one body, that is, the Church, of which Christ is the head;

There is one Spirit, the life-giving breath of the body, the **Church**, which is the Spirit of Jesus Christ;

There is one hope of our calling, that is, there is one goal, and that goal is a world redeemed in Christ;

There is one Lord, Jesus Christ;

There is one **Faith**, in which is the *complete commitment* of every Christian to Jesus Christ;

There is one baptism;

And there is one God who is the **Father** of all: he is *above* all, he is *through* all, and he is *in* all.

What this means is that God is in control, no matter what things may look like, no matter how chaotic and desperate the world may seem.

God did not create the world and leave it to its own devices, whatever we might think. He is all through the world, guiding and sustaining it, and, most of all, loving all that he has created.

God is the spark that gives us life, and he dwells within us through the **Holy Spirit**.

It is our Christian belief that this is a God-created, God-controlled, God-sustained, and God-filled world. He is the unity to which we, as Christians, seek reconciliation through Christ, thus as it should be.

In his Epistle, Paul charges us as Christians to work to maintain a visible unity in the **Church**. It is our focus which requires that we be doers, not passive believers.

We are being called as Christians to a new society that is the Church, a divine call, and this new society, the **Church**, is characterized by **Unity** and **Purity**:

Unity, in that it is composed of all people to form a single family of God;

Purity, in that this one people, or one family, are **holy**, and set apart from the rest of the world.

Christians, set apart from the world, are sojourners. Our true home is not here on earth but elsewhere; it is a heavenly home and our final destination where we will be united to God through Christ Jesus.

The focus is both on **Unity** and **Purity**: the **oneness** of the new society, the **unity** of which depends on **Purity**.

By **purity** is meant our character and conduct; the kind of life we must live within the fellowship of the Christian Church — a standard for our relationships with each other.

Paul lists five moral qualities which characterize our calling to this new society and are a reflection of Jesus Christ himself: **lowliness**, **meekness**, **patience**, **mutual forbearance**, and **love**.

First, **lowliness**, a quality much misunderstood, not servility, but rather **the humble recognition of the worth and value of other people**.

Indeed, our Lord humbled himself, and it was through him that true **humility** was recognized.

How is this **humility** essential to **unity**?

True **humility** promotes respect of others for their intrinsic God-given worth, as opposed to pride, which promotes discord.

The next quality is **meekness**, which balances **lowliness**; it is a quality of moderation, the mean between extremes, as in **the mean between being too angry, and never being angry at all**.

Meekness was not a synonym for **weakness**, but rather was the gentleness of the strong; strength under control.

Lowliness and *meekness* formed a natural pair, and were found together in our Lord, who was *gentle and lowly in heart*.

The next two qualities also form a natural pair: *patience* and *forbearance*.

Patience is *long-suffering towards aggravating people* (we all should be familiar with that); while *forbearing* one another is mutual tolerance, so necessary for human beings to live together in peace.

The final quality is *love*, which encompasses the other four, the crowning virtue, which seeks the welfare of others and the good of the community. Paul elaborated on this in the 13 chapter of his first letter to the Church at Corinth.

These five qualities — *lowliness, meekness, patience, mutual forbearance, and love* — form the basis of *Christian unity*; they are the foundation stones without which no external, or visible structure of *unity* can stand.

Moreover, these five qualities form the basis for our relationships with each other, allowing us to come together as *Brothers and Sisters in Christ* within our individual Parishes, or churches, where we pursue the work of a Christian.

According to Paul, *Christian unity arises from the unity of God* — God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the three Persons of the Trinity.

We are all **one Christian family**, because there is **one God and Father**, who is above all and through all and in all.

Yet, we are left with the question: why within the world are there so many denominations and religious sects if we are all one Body in Christ?

Perhaps we can recall from our Anglican teaching the terms *visible* and *invisible Church*, also expressed as the *Church militant*, and the *Church expectant*.

In the spiritual realm, the invisible **Church** is **one Church, one Body**, while in our physical reality, the **Church** has the appearance of *disunity*.

There is this paradox of *unity* and *disunity*. The **Church** in our limited human vision seems to be splintered, and indeed, in our human reality, it is; yet there remains that *invisible unity*. That we can ever achieve *visible Christian Unity* may be a theoretical question; but the essential prerequisites to unity remain — *Lowliness, meekness, patience, mutual forbearance, and love* which must be reflected in each of us if we are to take the first step toward *unity* whether it be

unity in the **Parish** or the **Church** as a whole. They are the foundation stones of Christian character and form the basis for the moral standards of any society and form the basic framework of our own American society.

Indeed, from family to Parish to **Church**, to community, to nation, even to the world, these Christian virtues lead us into the *bond of peace*, that is to say, a right relationship one with another, reflecting the sacred *oneness* of the true **Church**, dependent upon our integration of these virtues.

That integration of the five prerequisite qualities or virtues results in what may be termed an obliteration of *self*, or *ego*, for when the *self* gives way, when we let go of *our self-centeredness*, allowing Jesus Christ to spring to life in our hearts, then, only then, can we experience the peace, the *oneness*, that is the hallmark of the true **Church** and the all-encompassing, limitless **love** of Jesus Christ.