

Christ is risen. Alleluia.

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

A couple of weeks back we talked about the importance of prayer. Surely Jesus thought it was important. He often went off to a solitary place to pray; and today we have recorded Jesus' prayer on behalf of His church — it's called His High Priestly Prayer. In this prayer, Jesus seeks unity, not just among his closest disciples, but for all who believe in Him because of their testimony. *"I do not ask for these [men] only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one"* David agreed, singing: *"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!"* (Ps. 133:1).

Our nation calls for the same: "one nation, under God, indivisible" ... from the Pledge of Allegiance; "E Pluribus Unum" — out of many, one ... was at one time considered to be our national motto. It seems more recently that our country has fractured along many fault lines: race, ethnicity, language, the area of the country you live in, your affluence or status or capabilities, age, sex (and if you believe Supreme Court Justice Gorsuch, that means also sexual orientation and gender identity), politics. No longer a "melting pot," citizens sort themselves into different identities, and segregate themselves, and no longer see each other as neighbors but as enemies.

May it never be for the Church! May it never be for us as Christians! For we are in Christ, and that means that we are one. As St. Paul says, *"in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal. 3:26-28). Think of Paul's picture of the Church as a body with its many and diverse parts, but which all contribute in their way to the one body. Here is Paul again: *"just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ"* (1 Cor. 12:12). One part can't say to another, "We don't want you or need you." No, *"there are many parts, yet one body"* (1 Cor. 12:20). Or think of St. John's description of the Church triumphant: they are the *"great multitude that no one [can] number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages"* (Rev. 7:9).

Don't misunderstand. Our unity is not a function of our diversity. No, our unity comes from being brought into the one body of Jesus Christ, by the waters of Holy Baptism. Our unity is in Christ ... and in the Father and in the Holy Spirit — in the Holy Trinity, as Jesus prays: *"that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us."* One in the Father and the Son; one in the Holy Trinity.

Now, to be sure, you and I have another oneness with each other and the world around us. We have a oneness in Adam — in the sin that we have inherited from him and in the penalty for that sin and our own — death. In Adam all die, for all have sinned (Rom. 5:12). Obviously Jesus doesn't pray for that kind of oneness, a unity of disobedience. Shall "*we continue to sin ...?*" St. Paul asks. "*By no means,*" he answers as he points us again to our union with Christ in baptism. (Rom. 6:1-2). No, the common thread of our unity is not our sinful flesh or our sinful actions. Our unity is in Jesus, the Son, and in the Father; it is in the Holy Trinity.

So how does this unity come? It comes as gift through the glory of Jesus. Jesus says, "*The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one.*"

But Jesus' glory is not what we expect, for we look to His outward glory, and not God hidden in lowliness, weakness, and suffering. Jesus' glory is found in incarnation, taking on a servant's form, and in His obedience to cross and death. Jesus' glory is found in His doing the Father's will, fulfilling His purpose: "*Father, glorify your name.*" "*I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.*" "*Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*" He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die" (John 12:28, 31-32).

So He draws us unto Himself, when we see the glory of the Son lifted up on the tree of the cross, proclaimed as Christ the crucified, and we believe in Him. By this same glory of the Father was Jesus raised back to life again, and by this same glory we are raised again to a new life in Jesus, and we are given Jesus' glory that we may all be one, Him in us, and we in the Holy Trinity. We could not have received such a blessing had He not assumed our flesh, had He not gone to the cross for the sins of the world, had He not been raised from death to life and burst forth from His tomb.

Again, this oneness comes to us in the blessed waters of Holy Baptism: one in Jesus; one in the Father; and one in the Spirit, for this is the name included in the water that is poured over you: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Listen to St. Paul again: "*In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit*" (1 Cor. 12:13).

This is the vertical dimension of our unity: being one in Jesus means being one with the Holy Trinity. But there's also a horizontal dimension to being one in Jesus: God making us one with each other. This unity, too, comes not by our doing or striving, but by God's grace. The reality is that all who are baptized and believe in Jesus as their savior are one!

On the other hand, while we acknowledge, that even as all Christians are one in Jesus and the Holy Trinity, we also must acknowledge that Christians externally, because of false teaching or confession, separate themselves from those who teach rightly. Therefore, we must also heed Jesus' word when He tells us to watch out for false prophets who "*come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves*" (Matt. 7:15). And St. Paul, too, when he says, "*I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them*" (Rom. 16:17).

Both are true—as hard as that is sometimes to grasp. We are one in Jesus now, in the reality of our baptisms; and yet that oneness is not apparent in Christendom, and it manifests itself in confessions separating one from another. That also means, it's not true that "it doesn't really matter which church you go to." Surely it does. You wouldn't go to a restaurant that serves tainted food. More important than that is going to a church that preaches untainted doctrine and serves untainted sacraments. And this is where our unity lies as we confess: "For the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments" (Augsburg Confession, VII, 2).

Indeed, the Holy Communion is a meal of oneness in confession, not just in name — Lutheran, for example — but of confession in all the articles of the faith, for there are those who use the name Lutheran who are not one with us in confession. This meal is meant for those who openly and externally are one with us in the faith: maybe not in family, or ethnicity, or language, or nationality, but in faith. Maybe not in wealth or power or prestige, but unity in the whole of the apostle's doctrine. One in the confession of the Father who sent the Son; one in the confession of Jesus, the Son, who is one with the Father and with us and makes us one with the Holy Trinity; one in the confession of the Holy Spirit who brings us the apostolic word in water and supper and preaching.

Christian unity. Jesus prays for it, and it's ours now in the Holy Trinity, and yet in this world it's not fully realized. May we continue to pray for the church that all who believe and are baptized may be preserved in Jesus unto the end, and may we also work diligently toward true external unity, a unity of confession, that we may all be perfectly one as the Father and the Son are one.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

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