

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C January 24, 2010

Readings: Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12-30; Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Christian Unity

If we deny the truth, it may make us feel better, it might help us sleep better at night, but it doesn't change the reality of the truth. We may try to ignore our own mortality, the fact that we will die some day, but this denial doesn't change anything; we will die anyway. Some deny that God exists, or that Satan exists, or that there is any such thing as good and evil; but that doesn't change the reality that they all exist. Some deny that there is a Hell, they believe that a good God would never subject some of his creatures to eternal punishment; we pray that those people won't have to face the reality of Hell when they die. Protestants, and unfortunately many Catholics, deny the existence of Purgatory, but their denial doesn't change reality; many are in for a big surprise when they die.

And Protestants do not believe that they are part of the Catholic Church, but the reality is that Christ established only one Church. In the Decree on Ecumenism from the 2nd Vatican Council, it states: *"The Catholic Church embraces upon them as brothers, with respect and affection. For men who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect."* Restoration of unity among all Christians was one of the major concerns of the 2nd Vatican Council. And so, once a year the Church sets aside a week to pray for Christian Unity. It started last Monday and ends tomorrow.

I must admit that it has been a well kept secret. I noticed the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in the missalette at the retreat center, where I typically go for daily Mass, and the priest there has spoken about it in his homilies this last week. I checked the Archdiocese of Detroit Web site and didn't find anything. I checked the US Bishops' Web site and only after much searching did I find any information. I'm not sure why it hasn't been publicized more in the US this year. Maybe it's because of all of the other things pressing in the news from health care and the March for Life and the tragedy in Haiti.

But all these current stories reinforce our need for unity. Jesus read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in our gospel story this morning. He read: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."* Jesus came to bring glad tidings to the poor, to free those in slavery, to heal those who are sick and injured, and to fight oppression. Jesus returned to the Father and now it is our job to carry on His mission here on earth. He is the Head and we are the Body of Christ.

And in that Body, we all have different roles and responsibilities. We are all different members with different tasks and skills as we heard from St. Paul in our second reading this morning. He writes: *"As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...and we were all given to drink of one Spirit."*

Today let us pray that all Christians work together to make this world a better place. Let us pray that we can put aside petty bickering and come together to form one Body under Christ our Head. When I have gone on mission trips, one of the most disturbing things for me is to see Protestant mission groups using their offer of aid to proselytize and lure poor Catholics away from their faith. But sometimes, it is in the tragedies that we can rally as Christians to that unity which we are called to achieve. We look to the March for Life and see how Christians of all denominations come together to fight the assault on human life brought about by abortion, embryonic stem cell research, and euthanasia. We can look at the relief efforts in Haiti and see how Christians come together to be the arms and legs of Christ on this earth to bring healing and comfort.

I visited Haiti in 2001. At that time, there was no earthquake, there was no hurricane to deal with, and yet the situation was very bleak. The extreme poverty, the lack of food, the lack of clean water, the lack of sanitation and medicine, and unemployment rates of 50% brought about levels of despair in the people that I had never experienced. Parents had no hope of any future for their children. Now add last year's hurricane damage and this year's earthquake disaster on top of this already desperate situation, and I cannot imagine what it is like today. Many of the reporters are in Haiti for the first time; they think that all of the hunger and thirst are the result of the earthquake. But most of it existed already; there have been terrible injuries and fatalities heaped on top of what was already an ongoing crisis.

I hope you will be generous in helping the relief efforts to Haiti. Maybe you have already made a contribution, or maybe you can donate in our second collection this morning. But even more, I ask you to please continue to keep the people of Haiti, the poorest of the poor, in your prayers long after the immediacy of this current crisis fades away. They are part of the Body of Christ. As long as they continue to suffer, the whole body suffers. As long as they suffer, we cannot be made whole.

Deacon Joe Hulway