

## Trinity 17

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 always acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.*

The Epistle passage today from St. Paul was probably written around the year 62, while he was imprisoned in Rome and most likely just after he wrote his letter to the Colossians. It seems that, in addressing a situation at Colossae, Paul may well have realized he had stumbled upon something that must be shared with all the churches. To do this, he wrote what we call a circular letter that ended up at Ephesus, where it would become so associated with the congregation there, it would gain the title: *Epistle to the Ephesians*.

Now, what was it that Paul felt needed to be universally addressed?

**Unity** — the unity of all things in Jesus Christ. It 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?

If we look around us, in the world we see *disunity* rather than *unity* 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.

Perhaps most troubling today is the dissolution of unity in families, the breakdown of the family, of communities, of the moral focus once prevalent in our nation.

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, to address this idea of *unity*, the unity of all things in Jesus Christ, let's first focus on the *disunity* that we see within the **Church**, as well as within ourselves, indeed, 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.

We 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*, that is, our character and conduct; the kind of life we must live within the fellowship of the **Christian Church** and a standard for our relationships with each other.

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

These five qualities form the basis of *Christian unity*; they are the foundation stones without which no external, or visible structure of *unity* can stand.

These five qualities indeed 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.

Our *Christian unity*, according to Paul, *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 visible and the invisible, the question of whether we can ever achieve *visible Christian Unity* may be but a theoretical question. Yet there remains the essential prerequisites to *unity* — *Lowliness, meekness, patience, mutual forbearance*, and *love*, which must be reflected in each of us, and are the foundation stones of Christian character; they form the basis for the moral standards of any society are 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**.



The integration of these five 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 all-encompassing, limitless **love** of God, and the *oneness*, the *unity*, that is the true **Church**.

Here today, as in every celebration of the **Holy Eucharist**, we continue in that *oneness*, that *unity*, as we are joined together at the **Altar** in receiving the **Body** and **Blood** of Jesus Christ through which are in *unity* with the whole **Church**, visible and invisible, and through whom we are reconciled to the *oneness* of God.