

one

The Tragedy of Christian Division

Let's begin with a very simple question: Do you think Jesus wants all His followers to be divided? Do you think He wants to have thousands of Christian groups who refuse to pray together, who disagree about what's right and wrong, who argue about what Jesus would really want for families, for societies, for worship services, for individuals? Did you know there are Eastern Orthodox Christians who won't even pray the Our Father with other denominations, because they don't think other Christians really are children of God? And of course Evangelicals won't pray the Hail Mary with Catholics, because they think it's blasphemous to pray to the Blessed Virgin.

Some Christians think the Eucharist is really Christ's Body and Blood and that we should adore it; others think it's just a symbol and it shouldn't be adored. Some Christians think you need to *do* certain things to be saved. Others think you just have to *believe* certain things to be saved.

This is definitely *not* what Jesus wants for His Church, for His Kingdom. So what are we going to do about it?

two

The New Testament's Call for Christian Unity

Every Sunday, when we profess the creed, we say we believe in "One" Church. We believe in a unified Church, because Unity is a mark of Christ's true Church

Jesus Himself specifically prayed that His apostles and those who listened to them would be united: "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you Father are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21-22).

St. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, says, "I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you all be united in the same mind and in the same purpose." (1:10).

Why? Why does it matter so much?

three

A House Divided against Itself Cannot Stand

Our Lord Himself said that “A House Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand”

It’s a mark of Satan, not of Christ, when people are in conflict.

St. Paul writes to the Bishop Titus that Christians must “avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.”

The Church is Christ’s Kingdom, and it is supposed to be our entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven, where everyone is perfectly united in prayer and peace.

It’s a bad preparation for that, it’s a failure of the Church to fulfill our mission, if we’re all bickering with one another constantly.

Now sometimes, other Catholics are confused, or acting scandalously, and we have to help people see what the Church really teaches about faith and morals.

But if we spend all our time pointing out how other Catholics are wrong, or complaining about the hierarchy, that’s not fostering unity.

How can we win the world for Christ if all we do is gripe about the other people who are basically on the same team as we are? If you’ve been doing that, maybe it’s time to ask the Lord for the Grace to build up the Unity of His Church, His Kingdom.

four

The Scandal of Division

The bickering and infighting in the Catholic Church is deeply lamentable.

But it’s also, as we said earlier, scandalous the way other Christians are divided from the Church externally. Remember that Jesus, in His prayer for the unity of believers, said He wanted believers to be one so that all men would know that Jesus and His Father are One.

In other words, Jesus is saying that if Christians are united, it will help the world believe that Jesus is really from God. But the implication is that if Christians *aren’t* united it will be harder for the world to accept Christ. And it’s true.

There is, for example, a prominent atheist who stands in front of audiences and goes through a list of all the controversial current social issues. Then he says, "And on every single one of these issues, Christians are divided. So what practical difference does Christ make in people's lives?" He's got a point. So Christians should be undivided in what they say, in what they think, and in what they do. That's a pretty tall order; how do you fill it?

five

Bringing Everyone Fully into the Kingdom of the Church

If we actually care about Unity, and remember, if Jesus does, we should, then we should be committed to fostering Unity in the Church and to bringing everyone fully into the Church.

So what fellow Catholic, whether a fellow parishioner or a bishop or even the pope, do you need to start praying for more, and speaking about more charitably?

What Protestant friend do you need to be willing to invite to your home to talk about the truth you agree on, as well as the fuller truth they still need to accept?

Finally, what non-believer is there who needs Christ, and needs to come into contact with Him by coming into contact with His Church? Christ is salvation. Christ is the path to Heaven. And we, as members of His Church, are bridges to Him.

So for whom can you be a bridge to Christ, by being a bridge to the Church?