

## EASTER 7, YEAR C, MAY 29, 2022

*Unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno!* This Latin phrase translated into English is the motto of Switzerland but most of us recognize it as the rallying cry in the novel *Three Musketeers*. The phrase of course is All for one and one for all. We could almost say it is the rallying cry in Jesus' prayer this morning when he prays that we may all be one. As much as we like the concept of unity and being one in the Spirit, it sure is a lot more difficult to live it out in the day-to-day of real life.

This vision of unity is a powerful challenge. In our world today, it's a lot easier to look around and spot disunity. You just have to turn on the news to not only be struck by a lack of unity worldwide but within our own country. There is so much fracturing, polarization and inequity played out on an individual and institutional level. The damage of division has become a painful part of our story not only in our country, in our world but also in Christianity.

When Jesus prays that we might all be one what does he really mean? One what? One community? One church? One faith? One in dogma? One in doctrine? And when? When were Christians ever one in unity in anything? Christians started fighting amongst ourselves from the get-go.

The New Testament records disagreements among church leaders on kosher laws and how to bring Gentiles into the church. Do gentile males have to be circumcised according to Jewish Law before becoming a Christian?

The Council of Nicaea was established to bring about some conformity of doctrine throughout Christendom but failed as those who disagreed were removed and the beginnings of war between Christians began.

When Martin Luther posted his ninety five theses on the doors of the Castle Church he gave us the Reformation and more divisions in Christianity. England followed the lead of the Reformation with Archbishop Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury setting the ground work for the formation of the Church of England all before Henry VIII decided to part ways with the Pope.

Today there is roughly forty five thousand different Christian denominations and groups. We argue about how to baptize; do we immerse, or just pour some water on the person? Is the Eucharist a symbol of Christ, a Protestant belief, or is the consecrated bread the Real Presence of Christ which the Roman Catholic church preaches. Even music creates controversy, Contemporary music versus traditional organ classical music.

Our Christian faith has seen both great theological arguments and splits over the most inconsequential matters. Like bickering children, Christians have called each other heretics, their leaders Antichrists. More than one church has called it a sin to attend some other church. Families have disowned children who married outside their denomination. Today, differences on abortion, capital punishment and homosexuality splinter the church even more. Is your head spinning yet with all the unity the church exudes? It is no wonder so many people don't want to have anything to do with the church because of all the divisions and hypocrisy.

When you look at the history of the church it begs the question, was Jesus really praying that we would all be one together? What exactly is the oneness that Jesus prayed for?

He is talking about divine unity. In other words, the unity that is born out of God's love is not human unity. Divine unity rejects any and all coercive pictures of human unity. You just have to look throughout history to see the kind of unity that humans have manufactured through power, through coercion, propaganda, and elimination of dissidence. God centered unity rejects this kind of unity. We humans have waged wars of invasion, and colonization to force a false unity upon others in order to build an empire. Cult leaders have suppressed difference and dissent by molding followers into subordination. Countries have waged propaganda and reeducation campaigns to align their citizens to singular visions of power. This is not the unity we are being called too. The unity that is born from God's love is not about control but about liberation.

There's a reason Jesus did not command unity. The one thing we have to remember is that being one is not all believing exactly the same thing. It's not all acting or looking in exactly the same way. On the contrary, it's a celebration of differences, of different ideas and different ways and different perspectives. The kind of unity that Jesus prays that we may have is not based on us thinking and doing the same things, but on having within us the unity of God. Jesus prays that all Christians might be united in God's love, just as he is united in love with us and with God. If Christians are united in love, then we will bear witness to the world that God loves the world and everyone in the world.

Like it or not being a Christian puts us into communion with a whole lot of people we're going to disagree with, a whole bunch of people we may not even like. Jesus did not promote a cult of the independent individual. Christianity is not about being self-centered, but God-centered.

It is something the church, unfortunately, has forgotten over the centuries. We obviously are not all cookie-cutter Christians but we can celebrate our unity as beloved children of God when we learn to appreciate our diversity. Unity is born of an invitation to love one another in a radical, sacrificial way. Divine unity is not about who belongs and who doesn't. Christians are not one for the sake of being one but become one when united *in* the love of God. We need to create a compelling invitation into a radically different and disruptive vision for humanity. The church needs to live out an ever-expanding call to love the diversity of cultures, and religious beliefs that encompasses everyone. The church needs to be a place of disruptive love. Because when we practice this radically different orientation towards each other, and ourselves, divine unity emerges.

Try this: envision one person with whom you disagree about fundamental issues. This may be politics, economics, biblical interpretation, church or denominational stances, or even a sports team rivalry. Challenge yourself to pray for this person for 40 days. Now you're not praying to have this person change their mind to your way of thinking but asking God to open both of your hearts to see one another through the eyes of God's love and to move toward a greater unity as children of God.

If we can drop our preconceived notions and prejudices, remembering the prayer that Jesus prayed on our behalf, and if we can look at the other as an equally beloved child of God, then there is a good chance we can journey toward unity, one baby step and one relationship at a time.

You know, in many African nations instead of saying the Peace of the Lord be with you they say, I see Christ in you. I see Christ in you recognizes the other person as a child of God united by the love of God. It's a start. Or think of it this way: we have one

God for all, and we are all created for unity in one God. *Unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno! All for one and one for all! Amen.*