

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

John 17:20-26

The prayer Jesus prays in our Gospel reading for today is one of inclusion and unity. He prays for three things. First, that He will be restored to the glory He had before incarnation. Second, for the disciples. Third, for the people who would follow the disciples teaching and example. Our Lord wanted His people to come together in unity, and He still does. However, the church today is still divided on many issues.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus prays for the success of His followers' work in the world. Jesus talks about Himself and His Father being united as one. Are we also united in one? Do we talk about "we" or do we talk in terms of "us and them"? The primary purpose of our existence is for us, as one body, to be effective in our witness to the world. Jesus prays for the success of our witness. Unfortunately, there are still some people who have an "us versus them" attitude.

Now, don't misunderstand, God loves diversity, yet He calls us to be one. Unity is often missing because although Christians seek to be one with Christ, they refuse to be one with one another. Many want our church to grow while staying the same. That's not likely in today's world where change is the order of the day. We experienced that during the Covid Pandemic, when it was necessary for our rituals to be changed in order to adapt to the changing circumstances of our world.

Now, unity does not mean sameness. It means accepting. The problem with trying to achieve unity is that we do not know

Jesus like Jesus knows God. We do not trust Him like a child trusts a parent. We have to understand that we are stronger together than apart. We have the responsibility to reach out to others in love, forgiveness and grace. We are called to show the world that God sent Christ to the world. Our responsibility as followers of Jesus Christ, is to convince the world of three things: Jesus is the true voice of God. Jesus is the true voice of what God wants to do in the world. Jesus is the key to history and reality, the revelation of the invisible God. Once we have revealed these things to the world, we must be ready to defend the apostles' teachings against all attacks, regardless of where they come from.

We are all the same in the eyes of God. Wealth, status, etc. mean nothing to Him. We are all equal. Unity can only be achieved through genuine Christian love. We are to be the channel of this love. When we are ready to consent to love, He is quite ready to love. We have to reach out to those in need, to those who are in pain. We must respect ALL people. We must let the Holy Spirit guide us in our daily contacts with people. The Holy Spirit helps us reach out when we feel hesitant or embarrassed.

How, then, can we create unity? The process has four steps: 1. We must celebrate what we have in common. 2. We must celebrate credible differences of opinion. We are not to be carbon copies of each other. 3. We must speak positively of other members of God's church. 4. We must pray for one another. God wants us to be a force for Him in order to reach the world with His message of love and reconciliation. God will pour out His love on those who know and accept Him as their Saviour. Believers' relationship with God and Christ allow them to share His divine love and be joined with other believers in perfect unity. As each of us prayerfully reads the Bible, and as

we grow in our own unity with Christ, we grow closer to each other. We are not alone. We are part of creation, created to live in community with one another, with nature and with God.

We depend on each other, and we are all dependent on God, God gives us Jesus and our unity so that we may be effective witnesses to the world. This unity is the key to understanding what it means to be a Christian. Unity requires that we state not only what we agree with, but also what we disagree with. We must be united in purpose, love, action and holiness. Unity in sharing God's love, we as Christians can stand and tolerate great diversity. There is no place in this unity for hate, prejudice or writing people off. We must do the right thing by following the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". If we do, God will be happy with us.

This is the Last Sunday in Easter, and the true meaning of Easter is Christ's coming to save us. He wanted us to experience unity with Him and each other. He came to guarantee our home in heaven. Faith comes only through The Word, specifically the Gospel. It creates the quiet unity that allows the unbelieving world to believe that God sent His Son. His purpose in sending Christ was love. He took our place.

One way we come together in unity is when we gather for the Holy Eucharist. It shows that we are determined to live as Christ's people in unity with all His other people throughout the world. Sadly, not all Christians in the world can gather freely. In many parts of the world today, Christians are still worshipping in secret and are being persecuted in public, but they are still united as one with Christians throughout the world in their faith in Jesus Christ.

Unity of believers is God's work, not ours. Jesus asked God for unity, and God gave it to Him. He gives it to us today, and He

will give it to us in the future. Christ invites us to share His life in mission with the human hopes and hurts of people in the community. When Christ's love is given space to grow, the unity Christ speaks of arises within us, where our witness becomes one of power and light, for it is no longer simply us as individuals or a group that makes witness, but God Himself working through us.

All of today's readings focus on the theme of unity in faith. The story of Paul, Silas and the jailer is an example of what can happen when we unite in faith and fulfill the Great Commission. Unity is the foundation for evangelism. People understand God's love when they see it in His people. People are turning away from the Gospel today because of the bickering among Christian denominations. Christ prayed for the unity of all, so we need to become united with our fellow Christians of all denominations throughout the world.

AMEN.