

6th Sunday Easter Year "C"

May 1, 2016

Readings: Acts 15: 1-2, 22-29; Revelation 21:10-14,22-23; John 14:23-29

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you...Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

We all know that the Gospel is meant both to comfort and to challenge. In some cases, it does both, and even at the very same time. How do we react to these words in today's Gospel? Are you skeptical? "Easy for you to say, Lord." You are God and you know all things. But do you see what we encounter everyday? While it may feel satisfying to say this, of course He does, he sees all and knows all. And yet the Lord invites us to trust and to have no fear.

Yes, there are challenges ahead to live the Gospel, but so many joys also await us. The truth of Jesus is there before our eyes, yet we sometimes fail to see the signs. Do we see the Lord's presence in others? The signs may be all around us, yet we fail to appreciate the message. We may ignore it, we may be too busy and it passes us by. By your lives, you can be witnesses and signs of God's love.

One way that we stay close together in the family of the Church is through the gift of the Eucharist, one of the greatest signs of God's love. In Holy Communion, Jesus desires to dwell in our hearts and souls. When that happens, we change.

Unity is often elusive in life: in families, among co-workers, within a classroom in a school, and yes, even in the Church. How sad this is; how much we need to foster and promote unity. The preservation of unity within the Church is nothing new; nor is the desire for families to remain united a new desire. Parents keep the peace among children, managing all the issues that fall under the category of fairness, sharing of toys, distribution of chores and a host of other needed interventions. They often play the role of chauffer and referee, and it is all in a day's work.

These issues of unity happen on a larger level too. It needs to happen in the Church, and the preservation of unity here depends first and foremost on the power of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised in the Gospel, would be sent by the Father to teach everything, and remind the apostles of all that Jesus had said. It then falls to the Holy Father to be the visible source of this unity on earth, in his particular role of strengthening the brethren, being universal pastor and visible sign of unity.

These issues are not new. In fact, we can trace these issues back to the earliest days of the Church. St. Cyprian lived in the third century and he used some beautiful images to speak of unity in the Church in his most famous work, entitled appropriately, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*. He used the image of the sun's rays, remarking that though many, yet the light is one; similarly, the tree's branches are many, yet the strength deriving from its sturdy root is one. Finally, the streams of water flow from one ultimate Spring, and their oneness abides by reason of their starting point.

Cut off from the sun's rays, where is the light? Break off a branch from the tree, it can bud no more; block a stream from its source, it dries up. We need our source, and we must see that the Holy Spirit is the chosen instrument for guiding the Church and our lives in the present day.

The Church is the mother of all believers, and this feminine image for the Church is ancient.¹ Here the Catechism quotes our friend St. Cyprian; I will quote the passage in full:

“Whoever breaks with the Church and enters on an adulterous union, cuts himself off from the promises made to the Church; and he who has turned his back on the Church of Christ shall not come to the rewards of Christ: he

¹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph # 181

is an alien, a worldling, an enemy. You cannot have God for your Father if you have not the Church for your mother.”²

As our local Church in Saint Paul and Minneapolis prepares to welcome our new Archbishop, we once again are reminded of the importance of maintaining unity with our shepherd. Archbishop Hebda has quickly earned our respect and deserves our promise of prayers. It is precisely here where the rest of us come in. We have a real and substantial role to play in fostering unity.

Each of us is in a position to foster unity by means of our charity, patience and understanding. We bear with one another’s faults and we become instruments of peace. Jesus gave ‘peace’ as his farewell gift, and that peace is an expression of the harmony and communion with God that was a seal of the covenant. It is a gift of salvation, and we are the beneficiaries of that peace.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to utilize this precious gift of peace, lest we squander it in our families, our parish, our Church. The Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Helper, dwells within the Church, always guiding us on the way to peace. Let us be ever worthy and always grateful for this precious gift.

² St. Cyprian, *De unit.* 6: PL 4, 519