

+ Maria

### **Wednesday of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time – Christian Unity**

My dear Sisters in Christ and Our Lady of Mount Carmel – Our Lord Jesus prayed to His Father “that all might be one.” For sure, he foresaw and knew that this was a needed prayer, a petition that would echo through the centuries of Christianity, and even intensify. “That all might be one” – in Him, Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life. Not just the Church, but families need this prayer too, heartfelt prayer for a unity of mind and heart that will preserve the bonds of love among parents, children, relatives. Religious communities need prayers for unity, of course, as well, because in religious we don’t have even the bonds of blood to hold us together. The evil one is a master at causing conflict, and separating and alienating people from one another. There is such power and possibility for good, for love and for progress in unity that the evil one has to work harder to divide people and pit them against each other, in order to sow that rancor that keeps people apart from one another, and away from God. “That all might be one” prayed Our Lord. Unity is a gift of grace, a seed that can flourish if cultivated in the right atmosphere of love, humility and forgiveness.

Many divisions come, I think, because different people believe that different things are really important. I have a cousin who got married outside the Church. Her parents were in agony. They tried every means to try and convince their daughter, who actually goes to Mass on Sunday, they she should have a sacramental marriage. The daughter was unmoved, didn’t even seem to understand their concern. Of course, they had to call their cousin the priest to bring me into it. After a while, I simply concluded: for their daughter, being free to receive the sacraments or to have a Church wedding was simply not important. She affirmed: she is a good person, her fiancé is a good person, they don’t want to live together, they love one another, they aren’t hurting anybody, and they both agree to this, so what’s the problem? Who is anybody else to say anything about their marriage? Being in communion with the Church as we understand it is just not important. Unity and division comes or goes, depending upon what people consider to be important – my ideas, my ways, our customs, our rights, etc. When people say: I didn’t have the time or I am too busy to do something, I often conclude, really, that the thing is just not that important to them, because if it were, they would find the time to do it. If you watch others closely (not like a spy, but just paying attention) you would see that they find the time to do many, many things, because those things are important for them. And not just others, us too, personally, we are the same. I don’t find time to polish my shoes, I’m too busy. But I can find time to iron my shirts tediously, because my shirts that people can see are more important than my shoes, which people don’t often stare at. By the way, Father McGinnis often told us: you can tell a gentleman by his shoes.

So, we are divided by what is important or not. Today's gospel is Luke's form of the beatitudes. Unlike what we find in Matthew, Chapter 5, the Sermon on the Mount, Luke, Chapter 6, is called the Sermon on the Plain. St. Luke's version of Christ's beatitudes does not spiritualize them. Where Matthew says, the poor in spirit, Luke simply says the poor. Instead of hungering and thirsting for justice in Matthew, St. Luke says, "you who are hungry". His emphasis is on the now – laughing now, weeping now, denouncing you now, for in the kingdom of God, you will receive your reward. So, what is the value here? It seems from the point of view of St. Luke what is important is to be steadfast to what is right, to be faithful to Jesus, the Son of Man, even in the face of persecution, to live in your poverty, or your hunger, or your being hated, because on that day of judgment when the kingdom dawns in its fullness, you will receive your reward. We might call this in today's terminology, "delayed gratification". Life can be hard, we will suffer, but faithful suffering will have its reward. Luke does not countenance passive acceptance of injustice – don't get me wrong, because there are plenty of other places where he encourages action for justice. However, isn't he right when brings us the teaching of Jesus that we will just have to endure hardships and pain as part of our life, and our life in Christ?

What is the opposite? Jesus utters "woes", a very Old Testament way of condemning bad behavior. Woe to you who are rich now, who are filled now, who laugh now, who are well thought-of now, because your end will be the same as that of the false prophets. The false prophets lied; they snuggled up with those who were in power, choosing flattery and praise over the word of God. They were roundly condemned for leading God's people astray by their falsehood. They lived only for today and for human praise, and not for their reward in heaven and their recompense with God. Their value was the here and now, and not the hereafter. And, my Sisters, many people live like that.

So --- divisions come because different things are of value to different people, and in the beatitudes given in today's gospel, one division comes between those who live only for today, and those who live for their deeper truth that is only validated tomorrow. Where are we? Do we live for today, or for tomorrow? When your Congregation stands up for the right to life and loses money, or is penalized, you are living for tomorrow, for the ultimate victory of truth and life, that is for Jesus. The truth will win. This will separate you from society and from the conventional or worldly wisdom. When your Congregation stands up for communal living while many other religious are living alone or in twos, you are standing for tomorrow, because community living is hard but it is a symbol of the Church and of the kingdom struggling to be one here on earth. When each of us suffers because the work is hard, or obedience chafes, or poverty doesn't indulge my every wish, I am standing up for tomorrow, for the reward will be great. When we swallow our pride, or force ourselves to listen to others we can just be amazed at what God can reveal from the little ones.

We want to pray and work for one-ness in Christ, but that can never be watered down unity, but true, Christian unity. Aware of what we believe to be important, we must ask the Lord for the grace to strive for unity in charity, as your constitutions encourage. That unity will come out of honest humility. That unity will come by building on the rock foundation of Christ. That unity will come because we accept the suffering for truth which is part of the way of the cross that leads to life.

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