

## September 28, 2008 – 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in OT A

### LESSON: Unity Is Crucial for the Church

In today's Second Reading, St Paul deals with one of his **greatest worries**, an issue that he wrote about **more frequently** than almost any other: the problem of **disunity**.

The **importance** Paul gives to unity in the Church comes across clearly in his **first lines**.

- ? He **urgently begs** the Philippians to be "of **the same mind... united in heart**," and he does by appealing to all those things that are **most holy**: Christ, love, the Holy Spirit, and mercy.
- ? If we all are walking **at Christ's side**, how can we **clash** with each other?
- ? If we are all filled with the **same Holy Spirit**, how can we allow **divisions** to break up our families and **church communities**?
- ? If we are all as committed to **mercy** - forgiving others as God has forgiven us - how can we allow grudges, jealousy, and envy to **poison** our hearts and words?
- ? St Paul **truly believed** what Jesus had said at the Last Supper, that by our **love for one another** the world will come to **know and love Jesus Christ**.

Disunity was a threat to the ancient Church in Philippi, and it is a threat to **our Church** in today's world.

- ? Just think how much **more good** the Church could do if **every Catholic** in the world,
- ? the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, the high-profile and the low-profile,
- ? **held firmly** to **all** that the Church teaches and holds dear.
- ? **Divisions** inside the Church have **weakened the Catholic voice**, giving **free reign** to so many **social evils** and opening the door to the **culture of death**.

If today we reflect **more deeply** on what St Paul identifies as **two main causes of disunity**, each one of us can **leave** this Mass **better armed** to be **builders** of unity in the Church.

### ILLUSTRATION: Part I: First Cause of Division - Selfish Ambition

The **first cause** of divisions and disunity is **selfish ambition**. St Paul writes, "do nothing out of **selfishness**." The Greek word for selfishness refers to the kind of **unhealthy ambition** that leads us to **lie, cheat, and compromise** in order to climb the ladder of success.

When **Catholic professors**

- ? openly support **Gay Pride** week at their college campus because they are afraid that their colleagues will **ostracize** them if they don't,

- ? even though they know that the Church teaches that **homosexual activity** is **destructive** to the happiness of **individuals** and of **society**,
- ? they become a source of **confusion and division** for the Church
- ? they **hurt** young people struggling to death with homosexual tendencies rather than helping them.
- ? The support they need is someone to help them live the TRUTH, not a lie.

When politicians who **call themselves** Catholic

- ? support abortion, euthanasia, or cloning in order to **climb the ranks of party leadership**,
- ? even when the **Church clearly teaches** that those practices **destroy human lives**;
- ? when they publically misrepresent Church teaching ,
- ? they are a source of **scandal and division** for the Church.

St Paul told us to have the **same attitude** in life that **Christ** had, and that means we should be **ambitious** not for **ourselves**, but for the **truth**.

That's what **Christ** did, and so that's what **Christians** should do, and that's what will make our Church a **volcano of grace and salvation** for this fallen world.

## **ILLUSTRATION: Part II: The Second Cause of Division: Vainglory**

The **second** cause of division is what St Paul calls "**vainglory**," or vanity.

We all **enjoy** being **recognized, praised, and honored** - this is a natural tendency and there is nothing wrong with it in itself.

But when our **thirst** for recognition, praise and popularity leads us to care **more** about **what other people think** of us than about what **God** thinks of us, we have stepped onto the **slippery** and **destructive** slope of vainglory.

This causes **division** because the vain person is constantly trying to **make himself stand out** from everyone else – and for some reason, these seem to be a particular issue for us here in Lewistown...

- ? One of the **easiest** ways to do this is by **making others look bad**,
- ? by spreading **rumors** about them (the sin of gossip),
- ? **criticizing** them behind their back (detraction),
- ? and maybe even **lying** about them (slander).

For example, the **priest**

- ? who **criticizes** a fellow priest

- ? in order to make people lose their confidence in **that** priest and put more confidence in **him**
- ? isn't **building up** the Church, he is **dividing** it.

### The **long-time parishioner**

- ? who openly and freely criticizes their pastor or a **newcomer** to the parish
- ? for having new and different ideas or trying to start **new programs** in the parish
- ? or for not doing things the way **they** think it should be done
- ? isn't helping **advance** Christ's Kingdom; they're **hindering** it.

St Paul urges us **not** to follow that dead-end road, which is so **tempting**, and he gives us a **beautiful alternative**: "...humbly regard **others** as more **important** than **yourselves**."

That's the **opposite** of vainglory, and it's the sure path to **interior peace** and a **fruitful life**.

## **ILLUSTRATION: Part III: Illustration – Time & Talent helps Unity**

St Paul sums up his call to unity by saying that all Christians should look out not just for **our own** interests, "but **also for those of others**."

- ? This is the path to a **healthy Church** that is capable of **transforming culture** and **spreading authentic happiness!**
- ? This is **success** according to Christianity: loving our neighbors **as ourselves**.
- ? The only way to live up to this seemingly **impossible** standard of success is by following the example of Christ, who, as St Paul stresses, "**humbled himself**."
- ? Humility is a mark of **every** true Christian, and **every saint**.

This weekend we renew our **Time & Talent** surveys. This week you each received a letter from me again explaining the program – and today, you have the opportunity help work toward the unity of the Church by offering your time and talent to serve your neighbor – to reach out to them and love them as we would ourselves.

Volunteering and serving others in the parish

- ? actually turns us away from any self-ambition and self-interest;
- ? it keeps us from inappropriate vain-glory
- ? because we have "humbled ourselves" to give of ourselves to others in need.

## **APPLICATION: Conclusion: The Antidote to Church Disunity**

**Disunity** was a threat to the Church two thousand years ago, and it is a **threat** to the Church today. Thanks be to God, we don't have to depend only on our **weak human efforts** to resist it.

Jesus has provided **unconquerable weapons** that **all of us** can use to **protect and build up** the unity of the Church.

First, the **papacy**.

- ? One of the differences between **Catholic** Christians and **non-Catholic** Christians is that Catholics can **know clearly** whenever their **pastor is wrong** about Church issues - all they have to do is **look at the Catechism**.
- ? Jesus has **guaranteed** that his Church, through the **teaching authority of the popes and the bishops** united with them, will always give **sure and dependable** teaching on issues of faith and morality.
- ? We don't have to **argue each other** into the ground; we can **build together** on the **solid, common** ground of true Catholic doctrine.

Second, the **Eucharist**.

- ? It is not enough to **accept** Church teaching and be of **one mind**, St Paul told us; we **also** must **live out** that teaching by **being of one heart**.
- ? Through the **Eucharist, Christ's own heart** is united to each of our hearts, giving us his own divine **strength** and **drawing** us all closer and closer together into **one spiritual family**.

Today, as we prepare to receive this **great gift** again in Holy Communion, let's **renew** our faith in the unity, the **oneness**, of Christ's Church, and let's **promise** him that we will do our very best never to **damage** that unity, but always to build it up.