

Week of Prayer for the Unity of Christians

My dear friends in Christ,

Every year, from January 18 to January 25, the Universal Church intentionally prays for Christian unity. This week, we as people of faith join in praying for Christian unity. One might ask: How come an entire week is devoted to prayer for Christian unity? The simple answer to this question might be that unity is important to us. Yes, of course, it is important, but more importantly, the call for unity is at the very heart of our Christian faith because it was context of the Last Supper, the night when the Eucharist was established that Jesus made this call: “**That they may be one.**” In other words, it was from the heart of our Christian identity – the Last Supper, the Eucharist – that Jesus prayed that we may be one.

If Jesus is praying for our oneness, then it means that he is also recognizing the challenges of boundaries and differences that all too often divide us. The fact facing us today is that there are divisions within ourselves, our families, our churches, our nation. We live in a world full of divisions where it is either going to be male or female; rich or poor; Christian or Muslim; conservative or liberal; educated or uneducated; young or old; heaven or earth; sinner or saved; orthodox or heretic. We could go on and on listing the boundaries that we encounter, that challenge us every day and all too often we establish or promote. These divisions exist not only out there in the world but primarily and first in the human heart.

In His prayer for unity, Jesus does not pray for our mere tolerance, our getting along, or just being nice to each other. He does not even pray for our differences to be eliminated. Instead he prays for our oneness. What does this mean for us?

It means that to be Catholic is to enter into the prayer of Jesus for the Unity and to make it our own. He prays that we would be one as he and the Father are one so that our oneness would be the revelation of God’s presence to the world.

This does not mean that we become different people. To be one does not mean that we lose our individual identity. Jesus did not cease to be who he is and the Father did not stop being the Father because they are one. Oneness is not about change of identity rather, the only one reason why Jesus and His Father, our Father are one is because they love. They are one because they love.

This tells us that oneness does not remove our individual identities. It is not about eliminating differences. It is about love. That is why throughout the gospels, Jesus calls us to:

- Love God: Love the Lord your God with all your heart.
- Love your neighbor
- Love yourself and
- Love your enemy.

The love of God, of self, of neighbor and of enemy proclaims oneness. For in love, there may be differences, but there is no division. In oneness, our differences are taken into love and transcended by love.

Today, we are called to strive for oneness by loving. Achieving oneness through love is not something that comes easy. We learn from St. Paul that achieving unity requires humility, gentleness, patience and bearing with one another in love. Sometimes we have to pay a price in order to achieve unity, and clearest example for us is the cross, for when we look upon the cross we see the love of the Father which through Jesus on the cross, unites us to himself. On the cross, we see love crucified, a love which made it possible for us to always gather together in communion with one another.

As we gather each day at this table of the Lord, let us remember that whenever the Bread of life, the Body of Christ and the chalice are raised, that it is a body broken and blood shed that we may be one. As we go this week, let us see more clearly the way of unity which Jesus reveals, and be examples of love in the world.

With Jesus we pray that to the **Almighty God, to keep us true to his will and grant that we may all be one.**

--Fr.

Anthony

Ahamefulu

Parish Priest

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Respect for Life

This weekend, many Christians are gathered in different cities across the country for Walk for Life. These gatherings are in honor of and respect for human life from conception to natural death. As our Catholic faith teaches us, life is a special gift from God, for it is sacred and precious. As human being created in the image of God, more so, as people of faith, we have the obligation to cherish and protect all life especially the most vulnerable in our midst like the unborn. We are also called through the witness of our own lives to extend the gentle hands of mercy and prayer to our brothers and sisters who struggle and face difficulties in making decisions about life, so that they may be convinced of the great value of life.

Come to think of it, all our sacraments celebrate life. Christians are born (life is given) to the faith in Baptism, mature in that life through Confirmation, are nourished in that life by the Eucharist, and are restored to that life by Penance and Anointing of the Sick. Holy Orders provides the Church with representatives of Christ to impart that life, Marriage sanctifies all of family life. Thus, Christian life never ceases going from one Liturgy to another.

I encourage you to pray for life this week.

Prayer for life by Saint John Paul II

“O Mary, bright dawn of the new world, Mother of the living, to you do we entrust the cause of life: Look down, O Mother, upon the vast numbers of babies to be born, of the poor whose lives are made difficult, of men and women who are victims of brutal violence, of the elderly and the sick killed by indifference or out of misguided mercy. Grant that all who believe in your Son may proclaim the Gospel of life with honesty and love to the people of our time. Obtain for them the grace To accept that Gospel as a gift ever new, the joy of celebrating it with gratitude throughout their lives And the courage to bear witness to it resolutely, in order to build, together with all people of good will, the civilization of truth and love, to the praise and glory of God, the Creator and lover of life.”

**--Fr. Anthony Ahamefule
Parish Priest**