

Dear Friends in Christ:
A LETTER FROM OUR PASTORAL COORDINATOR

May Christ's peace, joy and hope be with you all!

The Nicene Creed, that as a community we profess virtually every Sunday, includes the statement: "We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church." These four words are deemed the four marks of the Church. That means that these qualities always call us followers of Christ to remember that we are part of the Body of Christ. As St. Paul reminds us, the body has many members yet is one (Romans 12:4) in our Catholic faith.



All Christians belong to the Church of Christ Jesus yet sadly we find ourselves separated from other Christians who the Catholic Church considers brothers and sisters. We find in the Catholic Catechism: "From the beginning, this one Church has been marked by a great diversity which comes from both the variety of God's gifts and the diversity of those who receive them. Within the unity of the People of God, a multiplicity of peoples and cultures is gathered together... The great richness of such diversity is not opposed to the Church's unity. Yet sin and the burden of its consequences constantly threaten the gift of unity," (CCC §814).

Without question, the "oneness" of Christ's body is essential to being Church, and that oneness begins and ends in Christ. He is the head of the Body. In June 2013 in one of his Wednesday audiences, Pope Francis noted, "... we are all in a relation to each other and we all come together to form one living body, deeply connected to Christ. Let us remember this well: being part of the Church means being united to Christ and receiving from Him the divine life that makes us live as Christians... [it] means overcoming personal interests and divisions, in order to understand each other better, to harmonize the variety and richness of each member; in a word, to love God and the people who are next to us more.

There's no doubt that this tendency toward individuality has at times surfaced in our Church, influenced our ecclesial perspectives, and diminished our unity in Christ. This lack of unity is often seen in the way we understand our relationship with the Church, our conflicts with one another, and even with those in authority within the Church.

Pope Francis addressed this when he went on to say, "In order to live, a Body and its limbs must be united! Unity is beyond all conflict. Always! Conflicts, when they don't end well, separate us from each other, they separate us from God. Conflict can help us to grow but can also divide us. We must not travel the path of division, of conflict among us, no we must all be united – with our differences – but united because that is the path of Jesus! Unity is beyond all conflict. Unity is a grace that we must ask of the Lord so he may save us from the temptations of the division, from internal struggles and selfishness, from gossip. How much damage gossip does! How much damage! Never gossip about others, never! How much damage divisions among Christians, being partisan, narrow interests, causes to the Church!"

In these times when we face direct challenges in the US Catholic Church to our understanding of unity as a Body of Christ – especially in our leadership – let's focus more directly on the marks of the Church when we recite the Nicene Creed. Let's pray for a greater sense of oneness and at the same time a much deeper personal commitment to Christ. Let's pray for the grace to refrain from harsh judgments of each other. Let's pray for the grace to "not so much seek to be understood as to understand" others, certainly in their anger and pain, but also in the joy of following Christ. Together we are better!

In God's great love, hope and mercy,

Deacon Jim