

## **Pastor's Pen: Ut Unum Sint Part 1**

Ut unum sint. This is a Latin phrase taken from a translation of John 17:21. It is part of the Great High Priest Prayer of John 17: 1-26. It translates in English to, "that they may be one." The core of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is bound in a desire of God the Father to reconcile fallen humanity into an eternal relationship with Him. This reconciliation is sealed in the Flesh and Blood of Christ offered on the Cross, glorified and resurrected from the dead, taken up in heaven, and given to us through the sacramental life of the Church through the working of the Holy Spirit. These are the realities we celebrated from the Easter Triduum through Pentecost.

This week and next week, we celebrate the two great solemnities of unity: Trinity Sunday and the Corpus Christi. The two are as intimately joined together as a person and their reflection in a mirror.

### ***Mirror Image***

In John 17:21, Jesus **prays to the Father**, "That they may be one, *as you Father are in me, and I in you. I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.*" Our union as a Church is a reflection to the world of the union of the persons of the Divine Trinity. This is nothing new in the Scriptures. Jesus makes clear that those who follow Him go where He goes, value what He values, teach what He teaches, and reflect the love of God to the larger world just as He did. In John 14: 6, Jesus reminds His apostles (and consequently us), "I am THE way, THE truth, and THE life; no one comes to the Father except through me." There are no other paths. The path to eternal life leads through Christ and His Church.

This might seem a bold statement. We might recoil at such a statement having bought into the insipid 'all roads lead to the same place' endemic of universalism. All roads do not lead to the same place. Be that true, the Scriptures would have merely said Jesus is 'a' way and not 'the' way. Truth be told, treating Jesus as a way takes pressure off of us to be a mirror image of Christ to the world.

On Trinity Sunday we recognize that we worship one God who is three persons. As our minds and understanding are constrained by the limitations of time and space, we cannot get our heads around the concept of how three can be one. It also exposes our lack of understanding of the concept of divine love. To understand the inner-workings of the Trinity, we must understand the concept of divine love (agape). If we are to be a mirror image, we must have some concept of what we are seeing.

### ***Agape: Divine Love***

We use the word 'love' rather loosely in our culture. We use the word to describe our affection for a person, a thing, or a concept. We leave the context to hopefully sort out what we mean. In the original Greek of the New Testament, the word 'agape' is used where we read 'love' in the Scriptures. What sets agape apart from the other loves (philos and eros) is that agape is completely self-emptying for the good of the other.

In trying to explain the Trinity, the ancient Church Fathers taught that the Agape of the Father begets the Son, the Son, in turn, has agape for the Father, and this agape is so perfect that it is also a person, the Holy Spirit. Without this love, the Trinity does not exist. St. John reminds us in his first epistle that God is love. (1 John 4:8) This love is completely self-giving and eternal. If we understand little more than this about the Holy Trinity, we understand this. Love has both a lover and beloved. The Father loves the Son. The Son loves the Father. The love between them is the Holy Spirit. Hence every outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a share in the love that God the Father and God the Son share between each other. Hence every sacrament, because it is the working of the Holy Spirit, is an outpouring of the Trinitarian love. As the love between the persons of the Trinity is totally unitive, our share in this love is to draw us into a perfect union; both on earth as it is in heaven!

Our union is to be a reflection of this love. We are to love our fellow members of the Body of Christ with the same love that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit love each other. As we are given access to this love through the sacramental life of the Church, it both points out why abstention from the sacramental life of the Church (skipping Eucharist, getting married outside of the Church, not getting confirmed, not going to Confession, etc.) is a rejection of this gift of love and why it guarantees division in our ranks.

### ***Being Transformed***

In both his gospel and epistles, St. John talks much of the how the love of God is to be lived in our lives so as to bind us to the life of the Trinity. St. John goes so far as to say that whoever says they love God yet hates their neighbor or chooses sin are deceiving themselves. If we choose hate, choose sin, choose weakness, or choose the easy way out, we are squandering the grace of God's love given to us through the sacraments. The Scriptures make clear that our squandering of God's love will leave us with God's justice. To reject agape is to reject God. To be ashamed of God in the public forum is to scorn the love He shows for us.

The love of God is supposed to transform whatever it touches into something resembling itself. That transformation is always meant to unite us closer to God and closer to each other. That transformation and love is supposed to act as a witness to those who are wandering and searching. Noting gives more scandal and truncates the mission of a parish as parishioners who war with each other. When we as members of a parish tear at each other we take the sacraments and trample them underfoot. Rivalry and division within a parish destroy what we are called to be.

This does mean we find a common compromise with agreed upon sins. The union we are to mirror is not a unity of mediocrity and timidity. The union of the Trinity is not mediocre and timid, but explosive, dynamic, and life-giving. Keep this in mind through the week. Why? If our parish is to be a union of the love of God, it must share in the same qualities of the love of God. Is our parish explosive and visible in its witness? Is it dynamic? Is it life-giving and drawing the searching and wandering? Questions for next week.