

Pastor's Pen: Ut Unum Sint Part 2

Ut unum sint is the Latin translation of part of Jesus's prayer on the night of the Last Supper (The Great High Priest Prayer of John 17:1-26) in which Jesus prays that His apostles, and subsequently their followers, would be one as He and the Father are one. St. John Paul II wrote an encyclical letter in 1995 with the title, "Ut Unum Sint" about the cause for ecumenism. Ecumenism is the desire for the fractioning of Christianity into many pieces to be undone and for all who profess faith in Jesus Christ to be reunited in the fullness of truth.

As Catholics, we celebrate what binds us as one through the sacramental life of the Church. Any union we have is bound in the union afforded us by God through His grace. Last week, we celebrated the source of that unity in the unity of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity on the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity. That union is poured into our lives through sacramental grace because of the sending of the Holy Spirit. This weekend, we focus on the most visible of those sacraments of unity as we celebrate the Solemnity of Corpus Christi (The Body and Blood of Christ).

In the offering of His Body and Blood at the Last supper and upon the altar of the Cross, reconciliation between God and man takes place. The obedience of Jesus to the Father's will heals the disobedience of humanity to the Father's will in our choosing sin over God. Since the giving of His Flesh and Blood would be considered a sin/peace offering, it is necessary for those whom bring the sacrifice to eat of the sacrifice so as to unite them to the sacrifice. Jesus, as one of us, acting in our stead, brings forth the animal to be slaughtered for the forgiveness of sin. He does not bring a lamb, a bull, or a goat. He brings Himself as the victim for the holocaust. That we would be able to participate in the offering and so be made one with it, He proclaims the elements of bread and wine used in the Passover meal (Last Supper) to be His Body and Blood. This gives us the ability to fulfill the teaching of Jesus to eat of His Flesh and drink His Blood (John 6:51-58).

Consume what we become

Consuming the Body and Blood of Christ unites us to Christ if we are in a state of grace. Think about what it means to be united to Christ. To be united with Christ is to be united to which He is united. If we are in a state of grace.

First, in being united to Christ, we are united to the life of the Trinity! If we are in a state of grace, that is. The mission of Christ was to reconcile humanity back into an eternal relationship with God. Our union as a people is fully dependent upon the union established, through Christ, with God the Father. That union is strengthened by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The question is whether our lives look like lives united to the Trinity.

Second, in being united to Christ, we are united with His Body, the Church. If we are in a state of grace, that is. In being joined to Christ and His Church, we share in the mission of Christ handed on to His Church. The central mission of Jesus Christ was to reconcile humanity back to the Father. For Jesus,

that entailed the proclamation of the Gospel. Do we proclaim the Gospel? Do our words and actions show a determination to proclaim the Gospel through word and deed? Because we are united to Christ through the reception of His Body and Blood, there should be an outward witness. Do people grow closer to Christ because they know us? Do they see Christ through our actions and words?

Even more to the point, when those not of our parish see our parish and its people, do they see Jesus Christ? Remember, we are the ones who receive Christ in the Eucharist! Have we become what we consumed? Do people see in us the forgiveness and mercy of Christ? Do they experience through us the compassion and pastoral care of Christ? Do people see a conviction to the truth through our living of the Gospel? If our being united to Christ is true, then it must bear fruit!

You'll notice that I keep using the phrase, "In a state of grace." What does this mean? When we choose sin, especially mortal sin, over the unity of Christ, we divorce ourselves from Christ. Our reception of the Eucharist is for naught because it cannot achieve the ends for which it is given. If we allow for division in our hearts, we will allow that division to spill into every other aspect of faith. It will poison every relationship to which we belong. Being in a state of grace, that is, being away from a state of mortal sin is integral to our living the union of Jesus Christ! We can't live outside of that union and model that union at the same time!

Modeling Union

Parishes, like any other institution populated by human beings, can either be paragons of unity or witnesses of division. In Catholicism, because we partake of the One Body and the One Blood of Christ, we all believe the same thing and work to the same end. When it appears we do not work to the same end, it breeds confusion about what we believe.

This is why knowing what we actually believe is important. Truth doesn't change because I don't like it. The mission of the Church doesn't change because I want it to be something else. The evangelical mission of the Church does not change into something easier. The call to live in a state of grace doesn't change because it is too hard.

Jesus Christ charged his Church to carry on the Mission He started. He sends His Holy Spirit to give us what we need to do it. He seals this mission in His Body and Blood so as to unify us. People should see in us as individuals, as families, as a school, as a parish that unity that Christ calls us to live. We won't get it right all the time. That is why Confession exists. The prayer of Jesus Christ for His Church was not "may they be at each other's throats" but "may they be one." For us Catholics, this isn't merely the gold standard, it is the only standard by which we measure.