

Twenty Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 30, 2018
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Reflection

The Church is called to share the Gospel: the good news that God loves us. He gives us many graces to help us fulfill that task. Our family life is a sign of his love. Scripture and tradition help us to know his will. The magisterium interprets the teachings of the Church and explains them to each generation. Our prayer life allows us to encounter God individually. The sacraments bring us to him as a community. They also strengthen us so that we can accomplish his will. Our redemption was accomplished by Christ on his cross; our sanctification is achieved by the Holy Spirit who makes us holy; even creation itself is given to us. God gives us all these gifts, but...but...the Church has a wound. It seems to lack unity. An ancient schism separates East and West between Orthodox and Catholic. Western Europe and the lands they colonized are separated between Protestant and Catholic. There is even division within the Catholic church. Right now, the Church is getting ready for the Synod on Youth. A working document has been issued in preparation for the synod. People are arguing about the working document...and by people, I mean bishops and cardinals...as well as those who pay attention to these questions. People even have arguments within their own parish! Disputes can mean that the Holy Spirit is giving us zeal.

Num 11:25-29
Ps 19
James 5:1-6
Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

But the apparent lack of unity between the Catholic Church and the others is a tragedy. It makes our task harder. People question the authority of the Church and the truth of its message. They see the splits, the disagreements, the history of violence. They wonder how we can profess the love of God, if we can't even seem to love each other.

But disagreements are nothing new. In today's first reading, seventy elders received the spirit and began to prophesy; they began to proclaim the will of God. Eldad and Medad weren't among the seventy elders but began to prophesy as well. Joshua said, "My Lord Moses, stop them!" But Moses declined. He said, "Are you jealous for my sake?" Moses identified the problem, the source of disunity. The problem is within us. Our fallen nature gives us a tendency to sin. We act according to our passions. We don't always listen to the voice of reason. God has written the truth on our hearts, but we either ignore it, or blur it through the fuzzy lens of our damaged identities. In this case, Joshua was jealous. He thought that Eldad and Medad were undermining the authority of Moses. And since Joshua was the assistant of Moses, they were undermining his own authority. But the sins that can cause dissension within the Church are legion. Jealousy is one and greed is another. James says, "You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure, you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter."

The list of sins goes on. All of our individual passions are multiplied by the number of believers who have encountered God. The result is a bubbling pot of stew that boils over and spills everywhere. Instead of feeding us, we are left to clean up the mess.

But it's not all up to us.

When we profess our faith, we say, "I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church." We believe in one Church because it does have unity. It's a supernatural unity that is perceived by faith, even if we cannot see it with our eyes. Our unity comes from Jesus who prayed for us at the Last Supper. He said, "keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one (Jn 17:11)." His prayer was not just a hope or a wish. It couldn't be since he is the Son of God. His prayer is effective and makes the Church one, even if it's hard to see. Jesus said, "Your word, O Lord, is truth; sanctify us in the truth." Jesus is truth, and we are set apart as holy ones to encounter Jesus. We make the encounter in a personal way, but we make it together. This encounter with Jesus makes us one.

Because Jesus gives the Church unity, because he makes it one, he is able to realize the dream of Moses: "Would that all the Lord's people were Prophets, and the Lord would put his spirit on them!" All the baptized share in the prophetic role, and Holy Spirit dwells within each one. Baptism makes us all prophets, and baptism makes us all temples of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Jesus said to John, "Whoever is not against us is for us."

And he gives us the hope that grounds ecumenism; that gives us a reason to talk to our separated brethren; to work with them; to pray for them: "Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose his reward."

Psalm 19 says, "Who can detect unmindful errors? Clear me from hidden faults." For today's Eucharist, let us pray for the grace to shed the sins that block visible unity within the Church, so that we can share the Gospel ever more fruitfully.