

UT SINT UNUM SICUT NOS

*A Homily for the Seventh Sunday of Easter (B)
St. Paul's Parish, Gävle, Sweden.*

Texts: Acts. 1:15-17.20a.20c. -26; Ps.102/103; 1 Jn. 4:11-16; Jn 17:11-19.

"That they may be one like us." My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, these words are taken from the Gospel we have just read. They are the words of the priestly prayer of Jesus. This prayer is like the expression of the last will of the Lord who was to return to Heaven soon. He prays that the Father may keep the disciples true to the Father's Name. This fidelity to the Father's Name will lead them to be one. To achieve this desired oneness, the Lord wants the disciples to be consecrated in the truth.

In this country, as in many countries around the world of today, much emphasis is laid on ***Ecumenism*** and probably less on ***Evangelisation***. And during many ecumenical gatherings, people read this text, the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to St John. I thank God for the thought rising in the hearts of the followers of Christ concerning the need for oneness, that is, for reunification. The division in the Body of Christ is clearly against the will of the Lord and Master. The emotion and wording of the prayer we have just read show this. And this unfortunate division among the followers of Christ is the worst scandal of Christianity. Most people in the world who do not accept the Christian message say that the division and even hostility among Christians are the reasons for their refusal. We must however, note very carefully, the meaning of ecumenism. Some people misunderstand what ecumenism means. Such people speak and act as if there are no longer real differences in the Teaching and practice of the Catholic Church and other churches. As Fr John Bertolucci tells us, ***"True ecumenism does not deny the differences. True ecumenism does not "whitewash" the differences. True ecumenism recognises the differences, discusses the differences and seeks legitimate ways to overcome such differences."*** Moreover, true ecumenism recognises the poverty of the human power to proffer solutions to the unfortunate predicament we have found ourselves in. True ecumenism sees the success of the endeavour as one coming from the Holy Spirit. As we are speaking, the number of "churches" is growing in geometric progression. Each "church founder" has his/ her own theology and spirituality and liturgy and moral teaching. Apart from that, we are witnesses to the new development in other churches concerning marriage and how this has become a new moral block in the efforts aimed at reunification.

So, the true unity for which Christ prayed can be achieved only by seeking the truth. And this truth is only found in the One who is "the Truth", in the One who prayed earnestly for unity among the believers, in the one Lord, Jesus Christ. The aim of true ecumenism can only be achieved by honestly adhering to the teaching of Christ, who with the Father sent the Holy Spirit to "teach us the

whole truth.” Our forefathers in the faith, the Apostles, always sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit before they took any decision. In every instance of decision in the Community, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, we see them praying, invoking the Holy Spirit. We have just read how they prayed asking for guidance to choose the replacement for Judas Iscariot and how Matthias was eventually chosen. Because they were guided by the Holy Spirit, they knew that what happened to Judas and the eventual choice of Matthias were in fulfilment of the Holy Scriptures.

Another important aspect of the life of the First Christians was their love for one another. And this is what St John teaches us in the Second Reading of today. But true love is not merely the result of human efforts. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 13). And where there is love of God, there is true love for one another. Since God is love, by loving us He gives us Himself. It is only those who have received this gift who can give it to others. By becoming man, by his death and resurrection, Christ became one with every human being. And this is the Christ who loved us so much that he gave his life for us (Cf. Gal 2:2). What does it mean? It means that since in Christ, God became man, we love God first by loving him in our fellow human beings. We know that it is difficult to love those who hate us, to be kind to those who plan evil against us. But by our oneness with Christ – because Christ lives in us – he lets us share his Spirit. And since the Spirit of Christ lives in us, we can truly love as he loves. And by this power of Christ alone, we can really help to carry one another’s burden and in this way fulfil the law of Christ (Cf. Gal. 6:2).

Lord Jesus, we repeat the prayers you yourself said. Help us to remove the heart of stone which blocks the way of entry of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, justice, unity, peace and love.

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