

22. January 2023

The true unity

1 Cor 1:10-13,17

Brothers, I urge you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, not to have factions among yourselves but all to be in agreement in what you profess; so that you are perfectly united in your beliefs and judgements. From what Chloe's people have been telling me about you, brothers, it is clear that there are serious differences among you. What I mean is this: every one of you is declaring, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.' Has Christ been split up? Was it Paul that was crucified for you, or was it in Paul's name that you were baptised? After all, Christ sent me not to baptise, but to preach the gospel; and not by means of wisdom of language, wise words which would make the cross of Christ pointless.

Lack of unity and divisions among Christians is an evil that has accompanied the Church for a long time and weakens its witness in the world. Opposed to this reality is the exhortation of St. Paul: *"I urge you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, not to have factions among yourselves but all to be in agreement in what you profess"*. But how is it possible to have the same way of thinking and feeling?

This can only be realised when people are united in one Spirit, when they are inwardly instructed by this Spirit and obey his directives.

With regard to the unity of the faithful in the Church, we speak of the 'sensus fidei', i.e. a common sense of faith. In this 'sensus fidei' the faithful are united in regard to the essential contents of the faith and can discern which things are in accordance with the faith and which are not.

However, it must be realistically noted that this 'sensus fidei' is fading away, because many things are happening in the Church that are not in accordance with her doctrine and right practice. In some respects the Church is deeply divided. This rift can only occur when the guidance of the Holy Spirit is no longer - or at least not sufficiently - followed. Then, instead of listening to the voice of the Spirit, common

views, personal opinions are put forward or, in the worst case, the blindness caused by the Devil appears. When this happens, divisions will follow.

But let us not lose sight of the fact that there is a unity that arises naturally from a common listening to God. This unity means living in the same light and looking at everything in this light.

This is quite different from what happens because of ideological manipulations, which can also create an apparent unity and a so-called common opinion.

Today, the Church is in search of full unity among Christians, in an ecumenical process. Here one has to take into account the theological dimension, the heart dimension, so to speak, and the practical dimension.

It is certainly desirable that Christians may one day all speak with one language, that they may bear joint witness to Christ and act in one and the same Spirit. If all the obstacles that still stand in the way are removed, it will surely also be possible in due course to celebrate the Eucharist together, but this can only be the goal and not the way!

The difficulties in the ecumenical process cannot be underestimated. While with the Orthodox Church we have many points in common, the differences with the Protestant communities are still quite great. It cannot be overlooked that, for example, we have very different views on issues such as abortion, contraception and homosexuality, so that one could get the impression that many official representatives of historic Protestantism have set aside the biblical foundation on these basic moral questions.

As desirable as it is to achieve greater unity, one cannot but consider whether the Catholic Church would be strong enough today to maintain its convictions by being closer to evangelical Christians, or whether, on the contrary, it would end up being infected by the shortcomings of the other confessions. We cannot ignore the relativistic tendencies that are spreading in the Church. One cannot aspire to a union between Christians who are no longer grounded in Holy Scripture and the morals derived from it. This would only bring confusion!

True ecumenism must take place in truth and love; otherwise it would be a merely human work and not a work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, prudence is called for. We can aspire to greater cooperation with Christians of different confessions, and even more to the unity of hearts in Christ, overcoming the false prejudices that one has of the other. But we must be careful not to speed up the process too much in a lack of spiritual sobriety, overlooking important issues and contrasts that need to be resolved.

As for us, we can pray for Christian unity in Christ - this is an essential service we can render to the Church in overcoming divisions!