

21. September 2023

Our service for unity

Eph 4:1-7, 11-13

I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you therefore to lead a life worthy of the vocation to which you were called. With all humility and gentleness, and with patience, support each other in love. Take every care to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together. There is one Body, one Spirit, just as one hope is the goal of your calling by God. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, over all, through all and within all. On each one of us God's favour has been bestowed in whatever way Christ allotted it. And to some, his 'gift' was that they should be apostles; to some prophets; to some, evangelists; to some, pastors and teachers; to knit God's holy people together for the work of service to build up the Body of Christ, until we all reach unity in faith and knowledge of the Son of God and form the perfect Man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself.

We have reflected again and again on vocation, and today's reading also urges us to keep in mind the responsibility and dignity of the call to follow Christ. St Paul addresses the whole community of Ephesus, exhorting them to the unity that comes from God. Each individual member can contribute to this unity when he or she strives to be humble, gentle and patient. Putting these spiritual attitudes into practice contributes decisively to maintaining the bond of Christ's peace.

Humility, far from being a servile attitude, is always ready to place itself below the greater. The greatest is by no means a false unity, but the authentic unity which comes from love and truth. St. Augustine once defined humility in these terms: "Humility places itself below the greatest and is therefore great. Pride presents itself as great, and so lowers itself."

The reading speaks of the "unity of the Spirit". And indeed: When each one places himself under that which is greater, unity in God emerges as a wonderful gift. Humility will be attentive not to disturb this unity by one's own attitude of pride.

Something similar can be said about gentleness. Here too it is worth emphasising that this is not a false pacifism, which lacks truth and true love. Instead, it is about the peace that only the Lord can give (cf. Jn 14:27); a peace that arises from unity in the Spirit. Gentleness, then, refrains from unnecessary quarrels, from always wanting to be right

and other similar attitudes; while seeking that which serves this peace that comes from God. In this context, it is appropriate to include these words from the Sermon on the Mount: *“Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognised as children of God”* (Mt 5:9). Thus, the peacemaker not only strives not to disturb the peace himself, but also tries to help others in the community of the faithful to preserve the bond of peace and to return to it.

The third attitude mentioned by St. Paul - patience - is also extremely important for living the dignity of the call to follow the Lord.¹ It is about knowing how to wait for God's timing; to wait confidently for the right moment, and not to determine it ourselves, moved by impatience. It is not an indifferent or sluggish attitude. With this same patience we are to treat our brother, for we must be able to wait for him, just as God waits for us. At the same time, we must pray intensely for him and do our part to ensure that our brother does not fail to make his contribution for the good of all.

Let us imagine or think of a person in whom these three attitudes are distinguished. We will immediately notice that such a person emanates something that brings peace and unity.

If in our following of the Lord we put into practice what the Apostle to the Gentiles points out, then all the wonderful gifts of God will settle more deeply in us: the peace of God, which the world cannot give, but neither can it take away; the hope we have in common, and everything connected with it.

As the biblical text says, *“on each one of us God's favour has been bestowed in whatever way Christ allotted it”*. Each one is to co-operate with this grace and put himself at the service of building up the Body of Christ, so that we become *“the perfect Man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself”*.

¹ To deepen the subject of patience:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETcz1LqzCwc>