

Unity in the Church (17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Ephesians 4:1-6—One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism

¹ I therefore, *a prisoner for the Lord*, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, ³ eager to maintain *the unity of the Spirit* in the bond of peace. ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call,* ⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism,* ⁶ *one God and Father of us all*, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)

1. Prisoner: Prison Epistoles (Eph 4:1; Phil 4:22; Col 4:18; Philem 1)

2. Unity: “the unity/oneness (Greek *henotēs*) of the Spirit” (4:3)

a. Visible: “one body”

e. Doctrinal: “one faith”

b. Invisible: “one Spirit”

f. Sacramental: “one baptism”

c. Eschatological: “one hope”

g. Theological: “one God”

d. Christological: “one Lord”

h. Trinitarian: “one... Father of us all”

The Living Tradition

Catechism: From the beginning, this *one Church* has been marked by a great *diversity* which comes from both the variety of God’s gifts and the diversity of those who receive them. Within the unity of the People of God, a multiplicity of peoples and cultures is gathered together. Among the Church’s members, there are different gifts, offices, conditions, and ways of life. “Holding a rightful place in the communion of the Church there are also particular Churches that retain their own traditions.” *The great richness of such diversity is not opposed to the Church’s unity.* Yet sin and the burden of its consequences constantly threaten the gift of unity. And so the Apostle has to exhort Christians to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” [Eph 4:3].

What are these bonds of unity? Above all, charity “binds everything together in perfect harmony.” But the unity of the pilgrim Church is also assured by *visible bonds of communion*:

— profession of *one faith* received from the Apostles;

— *common celebration of divine worship*, especially of the sacraments;

— *apostolic succession* through the sacrament of Holy Orders, maintaining the fraternal concord of God’s family.

“The sole Church of Christ [is that] which our Savior, after his Resurrection, entrusted to Peter’s pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it.... This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in (*subsistit in*) the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him.” The Second Vatican Council’s *Decree on Ecumenism* explains: “For it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help toward salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be

obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe that our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth *the one Body of Christ* into which all those should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the People of God.” (CCC 813-815)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

1. What kind of unity in the Church does Paul envision? Is it visible or invisible unity? How do we see that unity lived out in the Church today? What wounds to unity have you seen in the Church today?

For Further Reading

1. Peter S. Williamson. *Ephesians*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009.
2. Mark J. Edwards. *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VIII. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999.
3. Thomas Aquinas, O.P. *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*. Translated by F. R. Larcher, O.P., and M. L. Lamb. Lander, Wyo.: Aquinas Institute, 2012.
4. Andrew T. Lincoln. *Ephesians*. Word Biblical Commentary. Waco, Tex.: Word, 1990.