

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The Corinthians were St. Paul's problem children. Many were highly immoral. The food they brought to the Eucharist was not shared with those who had less. Some came to the Eucharist drunk and proceeded to get more drunk. They formed themselves into little cliques, always fighting and arguing with one another. In frustration, he writes, "Is Christ divided?"

Interestingly, that is the theme of The International Week of Prayer for Christian Unity that just ended yesterday—and I dare say most of us never even noticed. How many are even aware that there is an International Week of Prayer for Christian Unity every year from January 18th to the 25th. In fairness, I have to admit that though aware of it, I, like many pastors, forget about it as we slowly recover from the Christmas celebrations and start thinking about the coming of Lent. But this neglect is indeed serious if you consider that in his last wishes, Jesus prays just before he dies, "that they may be one".

Few of us would blatantly ignore the final wishes of a loved one, yet we do ignore this final prayer of Jesus for us. And we feel the painful effect of it in our families and even here in our Church Family. Every Sunday Christians baptized in other faith traditions come to worship with us at Mass because they are faithful, loving spouses of a Catholic member. They pray with us, entrust their children to us for religious formation, and often are the first to step forward to help at parish events. And, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your faithful witness.

Yet, because "Christ is divided" by denominational difference, sadly, these great sisters and brothers cannot share in our Eucharistic meal. This is hurtful within the family. It is hurtful in the Church. I know I feel the pain of it. What pain must this cause in the very Heart of Christ?

We divide Christ when Christian congregations don't respect each other. We divide Christ when Christians go to war with each other. We divide Christ when Christians from other lands seek to live with us and we do not let them cross our borders. We divide Christ when we ignore the stranger, disregard the poor, the immigrant, the voiceless unborn. We divide Christ when we choose not to accept every person as truly our brother or really our sister, despite however they may be different from us.

Anything that divides the human family, we might say "divides Christ". But, whatever divides the Church Family, surely "divides Christ". While we can, and must, surely pray for all those divisions in the Body of Christ, in far-off places and situations. However, we are in a position to pray and work at resolving whatever divisions exist in our own Church Family.

All the events of the past year of celebrating the Anniversaries of our Churches had that as its goal—to unify our Church Family. We are unique, worshipping each week at three different sites, with 5 Masses, each with its own distinct congregation. So much so that I can usually tell when you miss Mass because most of you sit in the exact same seat when you come to Church (and for some, God help anyone who takes YOUR seat). Therefore, I ask each of you, this year, to join in that goal—to unify our Church Family.

First of all, let all of us really pray for each other; secondly, please go out of your way to introduce yourselves to those you don't yet know; if a stranger sits down next to, please extend a hand of welcome to him or her; third, don't be afraid to move around a little, that is participate in a Mass at one of the worship sites you don't usually attend; finally, get involved. I find where people work together in the Church, they gradually become friends, then their families become friendly, and the next thing you know they actually become family to one another.

Flipping the coin, in this effort to achieve unity, stop complaining and criticizing—whether it be about the pastor, the pastoral council, the choir, or the maintenance personnel. If you have a suggestion to improve something, offer it to the appropriate person. If you see something out of place, pick it up and put it where it belongs. This is your Church home too. If you think there are cliques running things, offer to help. You'll never be turned away. And, if you are, I want to hear about it.

Today, we hear St. Paul beg the Corinthians to understand why they must not be divided —“so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.” Jesus died on the cross so that we would love one another.

I assure you, my Sisters and Brothers, if we become a Church Family that is truly united and we really work at loving one another, there will never be an empty seat at any Mass we celebrate in this parish. Our debts will be paid and we will never have a financial problem. Our children will grow in a safe environment that will lead them to love and serve the Lord with all their hearts. And, yes, they will know we are Christians by our love—by our love—yes, they will know we are Christians by our love.