

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Year C

Acts 7:55-60

Ps 97:1-2, 6-7, 9

Rev 22:12-14, 16-17, 20

Jn 17:20-26

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If anyone has ever worked with a group or committee that had a special project, you would know that success was dependent on the commitment of the members of the group, that the group shared the same ideas and principles and that they had the same goal. In other words they were united in their work for success of the project. Although the members of the group may have had different gifts and talents, they came from different backgrounds, and may have differed in other parts of their lives; it did not matter as long as there was a common goal and unity.

Unity brings strength to a group. When the members support each other it gives encouragement to the team. Even if one member feels weak and incapable to the task, when we are united with others we are made stronger and given more courage because of the support of the others in the group.

I'm sure that we all know what disunity creates. When members of a group have different goals, ideas and principles this allows for chaos, weakness and little if any support of the other members. Disunity works to breakdown rather than build up. It is obviously the opposite of unity.

- What happens in a family when the members of the family are divided?
- What happens in a neighborhood when the people are opposed to each other?
- What happens on a job when the workers are at odds?
- What happens to a Church without the unity of its members?
- What happens to a leader when the people do not unite with him/her?

In the Gospel today, Jesus speaks about unity. "That all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you: I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me."

Jesus is asking for unity from His followers so that the Body might be strong and whole and that the Body may give solid and united witness to Christ Himself.

As Catholic/Christians we are called to give corporate witness to Christ by our unity of belief, worship and prayer. The Body cannot be divided if it is going to give true witness to Christ. Therefore, as faithful members of the Church, we cannot choose what teachings to believe and accept and ignore what we do not agree with.

In the 1st Reading, Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, dies for his belief in the truth and his unity to Christ. There have been hundreds of martyrs in the history of the Church that gave their lives for the truth of faith and for unity in the Church. Their witness worked to build up the Body of Christ - the Church - and gave strength and courage to others who saw their unwavering unity in Christ and His Church.

Today, even more so, our witness to unity is essential. We give this witness through our

loyalty to the Pope, our unity with the teachings of the Church and its traditions, our unity in the Celebration of the Sacraments, prayer and in the living of the Commandment to love one another as Christ has loved us. This unity of faith makes Christ more powerfully visible and builds up the Body of Christ on earth.

Soon we will be celebrating the Feast of Pentecost and the first coming of the Holy Spirit to the Church. Remember, it is this gift of the Holy Spirit that is the unifying force that binds us together as one in the Church.

My friends, today the world is in desperate need of the witness that unity of faith provides. The world needs Christ and we are commanded to be Christ to others by remaining one in Him and united as one first in the Catholic Church and then to work for unity with other Christian Churches with whom we are still separated. All Christian Churches have a common goal but we need to be united in our ideas, beliefs and teaching so that the Body of Christ can be one.

The Eucharist we are celebrating is the greatest sign of our communion and unity in Christ and the Church. St. Augustine says that the Eucharist is our sign of unity and bond of our fraternity. Let us pray today for unity in the Catholic Church and also for unity between all Christian Churches so that Christ's prayer may become a successful reality: "...I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me."