

## **“GOD’S TOGETHERNESS”**

This tale of ‘togetherness’ appeared in the Chicago Daily News. It was written by a woman who was struggling with her own special “me and my shadow” problem. She wrote:

I’ve heard of the problems newly retired men and their wives face when confronted by too much togetherness, and I was always amused at the way they often get on each other’s nerves. I never thought I’d face such a problem, but it’s been two months now, and matters around here are pretty bad.

I ran out of patience that first Monday. There we were, the two of us. Dave busied himself by following me around, inquiring into my household routines. I tried to be pleasant, but my surly nature surfaced when he asked, “Why don’t you vacuum all the way under the bed?” I’ve tried to interest him in any number of activities, with little success. I’ve even shouted the merits of daytime TV. “What you really need is a job.” I told him, knowing he’d never be able to find one at his age.

Yesterday was typical. Dave and I spent the morning together, as always now. He sat looking out the window for a while, sighing intermittently. Then he came into the kitchen. “When are we having lunch?” he wanted to know. This is at 8:30! We went, lockstep, to the bedrooms, where he watched me make the beds. To his query, “What should we do now?” I snarled, “How about a duel with sabers?” A lengthy discussion followed of my system of sorting wash. I don’t like to sort wash – much less talk about it!

The situation is getting to me. You’d think that someone with so much intelligence, someone I truly love, would not be so totally annoying when faced with a change in routine.

Ah, well, my problem won’t last forever.

**Next fall Dave will be in kindergarten.**

Now, I know that this “*togetherness*” was not what Jesus had in mind when he finished the great prayer that he made during the Last Supper. In the first part of that prayer Jesus prayed for himself. In

the second part he prayed for his disciples. And in today's Gospel, he prayed for the community of the future, who would believe because of the preaching of the apostles. It is comforting to know that Jesus prayed for us and still does.

In praying for the future disciples, Jesus' main concern was unity among them. He asked the Father: "that they may be one as we are one." Just like the relationship of mother and son, or retired husband and wife, in my opening story, Jesus' choice of followers was sufficiently diverse in character, personality, style and social status to suggest that he found diversity a healthy, life giving force.

Jesus' unity, his togetherness, is achieved when each member, though different, is united around the same goal by mutual love. We are called from many different backgrounds to form a community, the one body in Christ. By rising above our differences we become witnesses of God who allows his light to shine in a variety of ways. **Community, however, is a great challenge.** It involves solidarity, sharing, belonging, compassion and joy in the well-being of others.

Sadly, down the ages the unity Jesus wished for his community, his church, was fractured many times. The first major split came in 1054, between the East and the West, when the Orthodox sect believed that Rome was departing from the God given structure and faith, by inexcusable claims and unfounded doctrines. The second split came in the 1500's when Reformists believed that God had called them to such reformation of the faith and order of the church, and they would restore it to its primitive purity, outside the Roman Catholic Church. The third split came when the "Episcopalians," those of the Anglican and Old Catholic communities believed that the faith must indeed be reformed but within the framework of ancient and historic church government by bishops, and became separated from Rome and from many of the Reformed churches.

Still others believed that the established churches of their day would not give free path to the Word of salvation, so the older free churches and the Methodist sect felt themselves forced to adopt

independent church orders, which are founded on the principle of “self-determination” in matters of doctrine and discipline, and which comprise a majority of churches within the World Council of Churches.

And the beat goes on, approximately 23,000 denominations and counting. Disunity among the churches is one sign of our selfishness, our sinfulness. Differences in belief and practice, between Christians of different denominations, are sad, but the real scandal may be more about the hostility between the different denominations, particularly against the Catholic Church.

Disunity occurs on a local level as well. Rick Warren, an Evangelical minister at the Saddleback Church was criticized by a fellow Protestant minister, for his call for unity and common ground with Muslims. The criticism was levied at the 2007 directive to other pastors, which was titled “What the Bible Says about Handling Disunity”, and more specifically, about his biblical approach for dealing with dissenters who oppose his philosophy and theology – “you’ve got to protect the unity of your church. If that means getting rid of troublemakers, do it.” *[Written comments from recent surveys].*

Fortunately, for us – Our Pope Benedict XVI, who was quoted, during a meeting with the leader of the World Conference of Churches, said: “The commitment of the Catholic Church to the search for Christian unity is irreversible.” While not a member of the World Conference of Churches, the Catholic Church cooperates with the WCC. At that time, his comments, regarding the search for unity between the Roman Catholic Church and other Christians, were underlining his desire to improve relations and heal the 1,000 year old rift with the Orthodox Church. But the Pope has emphasized his pledge to church unity on several occasions during his papacy, saying his primary task would be to work tirelessly to unify all followers of Christ. Recent news articles suggested some major improvements with several individual churches within the Anglican fold.

How can we ourselves help the cause of unity?

By humble repentance, which we undertake ourselves, we can gain spiritual maturity. This means a sincere acknowledgement before God that we have sinned and are unable to heal our divisions by ourselves. In what ways does our individual disunity keep us from carrying out the healing and reconciling mission of Christ in a broken and needy world?

By sincere thankfulness to God for the actual oneness he has given to his church. Within the unity that is sought, Christians can exchange their own experiences to show that we belong to Christ. Only Christ can help us grow in the love of the Father, in the service of the Spirit of holiness and of unity, with desires to save the world.

By allowing the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which assists us in hearing what Our Lord is speaking to us through Holy Scripture. This foundation in Christ makes us sisters and brothers. An understanding of what we are told in the scripture can fill us with love for others and trusting in God's divine intervention.

By special and studious attention paid to the importance of Baptism and the Eucharist, which set forth the dying and rising again in Christ, as instruments of unity. God in Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit has laid down a common foundation for all the Baptized. Christians can affirm their faith, confess their thankfulness and humility, by their convictions. It is the basis for being the one true Church of Christ.

The measure of our concern for unity is the degree to which we pray for it. Because we belong to Christ we belong to one another and are accountable to one another. And God's temple, the church is a place of worship and worship is the most powerful expression of our common belonging to Christ. Every act of worship is a victory over our division and a celebration of our unity.