

Pepsi or Coca-Cola, cats or dogs, organ or guitar, Latin chant or English hymns, and the list goes on and on. It is not easy to be of one mind these days. While these differences concern matters of taste, others bear upon matters of faith. Saint Paul is urging the disciples to be of the same mind and act with the same love. That is a very tall order. What does it mean to be united in heart and how can we think one thing?

For starters, it depends upon the scope of the call to unity. Catholics can and do have varying tastes about any number of issues and this provides a truly universal flair to the Church. When I have traveled and have seen the enthusiasm of Catholics from Africa at Papal audiences, I am edified. When I have learned about the devotion of Catholics in Spain during Holy Week, with their long processions and re-enactments of the passion, I am deeply moved. And the dedication of the Filipino people with their focus on strong family life is a testament to centuries of faith in Asia.

Saint Paul makes a clarion call for unity and follows it with some practical advice; one may conclude he is signaling how the unity is to be fostered. He says, "Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves." What if we lived this way? What might that look like?

*Vainglory* is not commonly used in today's parlance. We call it vanity, a word we encountered several times in the daily readings last week from the Book of Ecclesiastes. But *vainglory* is more descriptive. It is the inordinate love or desire for the praise and honor of others. If we let our desire for praise obscure our dependence upon God, we act with vanity. Here, glory becomes vain- it becomes empty, void of meaning. I recently participated on a Zoom meeting for an Archdiocesan task force on which I serve. The leader was rapidly taking notes in real time on a screen share. But in one case, I saw that a suggestion I offered was wrongly attributed to

another person in the group. I nearly chimed in to clarify who made the remark, before catching myself. What was I thinking? What difference does it make, except if I wanted the credit? Empty glory.

Glory becomes empty when we seek it for an unworthy reason, when we seek the glory of those who are unworthy to give it (i.e. seeking the approval of corrupt people), or when we seek the glory for our own sake. Our second reading this weekend warns against this attitude. Put aside selfish desire and seek the unity of the Body of Christ.

In 1959, St. John XXIII wrote a beautiful encyclical letter on the topics of truth, unity and peace in a spirit of charity. In part III, he quoted an old adage, attributed to various authors over the years: “In necessary things, unity, in doubtful ones, liberty, in all things charity.”<sup>1</sup> The Church has traditionally spoken of unity in three areas: unity of doctrine, unity of organization, unity of worship. For example, you can attend the same Mass on Sunday anywhere in the world. You will always hear the name of the pope and the local bishop invoked, showing our communion with the universal Church. In essentials, it is the same Eucharist everywhere.

With respect to our fundamental doctrines, we are called to unity. We are called to the defense of all human life from conception through natural death; to believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, to observe the Ten Commandments and the immutable moral laws of God. We are called to show respect for our bishop and the Pope, even if we may not understand each and every particular decision they make.

Fostering unity is hard work– it is by no means a given. The same could be said with respect to our families or our communities. Our current social and political situation in our nation is fragmented and divided, and this undoubtedly is accentuated in an election year.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *AD PETRI CATHEDRAM*, 29 June 1959 “In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas.”

In the weeks ahead, I encourage you to educate yourself on some key principles of our faith and how they relate to the civic duty that each adult possesses to foster the common good and “bring the richness of our faith to the public square.”<sup>2</sup> To this end, I have placed a link to the USCCB document entitled “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” on the parish website.

Please take the time to read it in the weeks ahead because the bishops seek to help Catholics “form their consciences, apply a consistent moral framework to issues facing the nation and world, and shape their choices in elections in the light of Catholic Social Teaching.”<sup>3</sup>

It provides a useful framework as you consider a range of important issues, including the pre-eminence attached to the promotion of the Gospel of life. It outlines a clear rationale for the connection between our faith and our participation in civic life. As we look ahead, today’s readings serve as a worthwhile challenge, a call to unity amidst a time of tremendous tension in the world and our nation.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Introductory Letter 2019, to the re-released 2015 document “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States.”

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.