

One

One day last week, after having presided over the funeral of a parishioner, a very tall man approached me from among the attendees: He extended a hand, and we shook, and he said to me, *“Thank you, that was very beautiful; I am a Pentecostal Christian and this was very different for me.”* It was just a brief encounter; one between a Catholic Christian and a Pentecostal Christian. It was nothing extraordinary. However, encapsulated in an encounter like that is a long, complicated and painful history. . . but also a glimmer of hope.

There are an estimated 33,000 denominations of Christian Faith. One could rightly say that they are **united** by the name “Christian” but, at one and the same time, they are **divided** by doctrines, forms of worship, particular emphases, and mutual distrust. Beyond this large level of fragmentation, there is the more radical embrace of the Church-of-One-Person . . . the person who says, *“I believe in God, but I do not believe in ‘organized religion.; I believe, but I will not belong.”*

I would not be what I am if I did not believe that the Catholic Church expresses the will of Jesus Christ for unity; primarily unity around the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, but also around the Office of St. Peter the Apostle, and the Veneration of Mary, the Mother of God who is the model believer in her Son, and all of this rooted in the Word of God. The word “Catholic” is a descriptor that goes way back to the early Church, used by people like St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Augustine to mean “universal” It is a “mark” of the Church that it is ordered to be “universal.”

Every Catholic Christian and every other Christian must receive the words of Jesus’ prayer from John 17 with a great deal of discomfort and sorrow: We are **united** by the Holy Name of Jesus and the mystery of his Life, Death and Resurrection, but we are **divided** by all those other things: interpretation, emphases, doctrines, distrust, and so forth. We are not “one” in any visible sense of the word. Some people suggest that Jesus doesn’t mind

diversity, or that the “oneness” of Christians is an invisible ideal or only a future reality. But, it seems very difficult to make such a case by an honest reading of the Gospels. Jesus does talk about a “Church” and a “Flock” and a very profound sense of “one-ness:” *“Father, I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me that they may be one, as we are one---I living in the, you living in me.”* St. Paul has many expressions which seem to flow from the spirit of Jesus’ prayer: In the letter to the Ephesians he speaks of **“One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism”** And in another place he says, **“Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf,”** (1 Cor. 10:17). And, in yet another place he is even more radical in his expression: **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”** (Galatians 3:28).

In order to take such a vast theme and to apply it to ourselves in a personal way, we need to think of how it stands in opposition to the **underlying dynamic** at work in the world of Christianity and in the World at large: I would say that it can be expressed in many words: **radical individualism, the atomization of our culture, tribalism, loss of a sense of the common good, or, according to the title of one popular book, Bowling Alone.** In other words, we are up against the wolf whose desire is to scatter the sheep. We are facing an enemy whose tactic is to divide and conquer. And the implications for each one of us is that we must resist. We must resist the isolation facilitated by our smartphones and modern social media. And the most positive act of resistance is what we do every week: We show up to Mass on Sunday to worship the Good Shepherd who gather’s the flock and to offer Him as the perfect sacrifice for our forgiveness to the Heavenly Father. And the most radical part of this is our belief in his true presence under the signs of bread and wine that creates a communion of persons with Him and with one another.

But, what we cling to his hope in His All-powerful Grace to make us One, as He and the Father are ONE. He gave us ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC and APOSTOLIC Church . . . this is what has been given us to focus upon and to live as our every-day witness of faith.

