

# What Unites Us

Have you experienced a common bond with others? What was that bond? How did it bind you together?

Sometimes experience bonds people together in unexpected ways. A tragedy or a spectacle or, even, a leader can bring diverse peoples together to share a common memory or goal. The intimacy the bond brings can only be understood by those it directly affects. It seems the bond can only be communicated vicariously to an outsider through analogy.

In John's gospel, Jesus described the bond that unites his followers as the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. The analogy of the Good Shepherd worked, but had its limits.

## Popular Translation

Jesus told the people:

27 The sheep of my flock hear me calling them.

I know each of them.

And they all follow me.

28 I give them a life with God that will never end,  
so they wouldn't be lost when times get tough.

No one can take them out of my care.

29 My Father gave me all my followers.

He is greater than everything.

No one can take them out of my Father's care.

30 My Father and I are one.

What unites us as Christians? Culture, habit, fellowship, or something deeper? In John's gospel, Jesus gave us the answer.

## Literal Translation

Jesus told the crowd:

27 My sheep hear my call. I know them and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, so they might not be destroyed into the age. Someone will not grasp them out of my hand. 29 My Father who has given to me all (my followers) is greater (than everything). No one is able to grasp (them) out of the hand of the Father. 30 I and the Father are one.

10:28 "eternal life . . . into the age" These two phrases were equivalent. Eternal life did not only refer to unending life. It referred to life with God. (Since God lives in the eternal moment, life with him is unending.)

"Into the age" referred to God's era, a time of the Kingdom. Notice the results of life with God included salvation from the tribulation of the end time (not destroyed into the age) and assurance of life with the Lord (no one will take the saved from his hand).

10:29 "My Father who has given to me all (followers) is greater (than everything)." This is a very difficult sentence to translate because of the word "all." What did the word refer to? There were two possibilities: 1) what the Father gave Jesus (i.e., his followers) or 2) the power of the Father (he is greater than "all," i.e., everything). The translation above tries to honor both meanings.

In the Good Shepherd discourse (10:1-42), Jesus described his purpose before a skeptical audience. He acts like a dedicated shepherd. He protects his flock against thieves and wolves even to the point of death. He befriends his followers, as a shepherd who treats each sheep like we treat our favorite family pet. He loves each and every one of us, his followers, intimately [27].

As his sheep, we follow his call [27]. Sheep are not the slow animals some claim; they can do tricks and they know the particular call of their shepherd. In many countries, shepherds will mix their herds in holding pens; when a shepherd calls, only his or her sheep will respond.

Our relationship is more than call and response, however. Jesus gives us a life that cannot be taken away [28]. With this life we are in the hands of Jesus and the hands of the Father [28-29].

The Father gave Jesus his followers as a gift [29]; Jesus gives us, his followers, eternal life as a gift. Both are the presence of the Spirit. The Spirit of the Father flows through the Son to us; this outpouring unites us to Christ and to the Father.

Our relationship with Jesus begins with his call and our response. The dialogue between Christ and us deepens the relationship. Through the relationship, the Father becomes accessible, even intimate. In this relationship we find a life that can never die; this life is intrinsic to the dialogue. The entire package (dialogue, relationship, life in the relationship, and intimacy with the Father) is the result of the Spirit. As the Spirit unites the believer to Christ, so to it unites Christians to one another.

## Catechism Theme: Four Marks of the Church (CCC 866-869)

In the gospel, Jesus stressed the unity he has with his Father and with his followers. This unity manifests itself in the four marks of the Church, those qualities that define the Church. The four marks are: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

How is the Church "one?" The Church is one because it has one Lord, it has only one faith, it is formed in one Baptism, it comes together as one Body, it is given life by one and the same Spirit, and it shares one hope for the future. (866)

How is the Church "holy?" The Church is holy because God the Father called people together to form the Church, God the Son gave his life up for the Church and is one with the Church in the sacraments, and God the Holy Spirit gives the Church life. The Church is a home for sinners who wish to come closer to God. (867)

How is the Church "catholic?" The word "catholic" means "for everyone at all times." The Church is catholic because it serves everyone and at all times. The Church has the complete faith. And the Church is the true way to heaven. (868)

How is the Church "apostolic?" The faith and power come from Christ, the Pope in union with the bishops and the Church has the power to teach faith and morals infallibly (i.e., without error). (869)

Have you ever reflected on the bond that unities you with other Christians? Which of the four marks are involved in that bond?

God is the cause of our community. He sent his Son into the world to call us, to embrace us, to unite us. He makes us one with his Son. He sanctifies us with his Spirit. He gifts us with a full faith and the power to reach out to others, no matter who they are. He sends us out the same way he sent out the apostles, to spend the Good News to others.

As we reach out to the Father, do we reach out to others, to become one with them? How can we share our unity with them?