

22 January 2023—The 3rd Sunday after The Epiphany: I Corinthians 1:10-18

Today's passage from 1st Corinthians begins: *Now I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose* (I Corinthians 1:10). When I am proclaimed Philosopher-King I will decree this passage be written on the walls of every Church, every Christian home, and emailed every day to every Christian. The health of a parish and of each follower of Jesus is much more threatened by negativity, in-fighting, egoistical hyper-sensitivity, and character-assassinating gossip than anything else. It is always easier to tear down than build up, to complain than compliment, to hold a grudge than forebear, to be negative than to love. This may sound impractical or naïve, but I believe it is true: the resolution to any Church problem perceived as practical, invariably has a spiritual solution. Efficiency, good decisions, making budget, and inspiring leadership are tools for our journey but only that; all serve a larger objective: as quoted before: *...that you may be united in the same mind and the same purpose.*

What is this "same mind?" In Philippians (2:1-2, 4-7) Paul writes: *If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord...Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who...being found in human form, ...humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.*

Being in complete agreement one with another is not our goal *if* our corporate mind is not in accord with the mind of Christ. Drawing closer to the mind of Christ involves living humbly in our relationships and by serving others in His Name in response to their needs, not our own.

We are also called to be united in the "same purpose." Later in 1st Corinthians Paul writes: *Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries* (4:1). In Ephesians (4:12-13), he writes the purpose of spiritual gifts is *...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ*; from Colossians (1:10), *lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.* Our "same purpose" is to live evangelical lives in Christ, through Christ and for Christ. You may hesitate at the description "evangelical;" it simply means sharing the good news in thought, word, and deed, in Christ, through Christ and for Christ.

We live *in* Christ day-by-day in every relationship and environment. The prayer, "not my will, but Your will be done in me today, Lord Jesus" defines us, a constant refrain in our conscious consciousness.

We live *through* Christ by relying on the Holy Spirit's power in our lives. We surrender all thoughts, words, actions and habits of body, mind, and spirit. We admit our powerlessness so God's power may work in us. We set aside our ways, our needs, our perspective for Christ's way

We live *for* Christ as we share His love. We let our light—the light of Christ given us—shine so others see Christ at work in us and give glory to God (Matthew 5:16). Faith without conversion of one's thoughts, words and actions is no faith at all. Faith not yearning for others' salvation, helping others' journey into Christ, unwilling to contend with opposition, misunderstanding, or contempt is no faith at all. Faith seeks what is good, builds up others, readily forgives, relentlessly grows in love, and joyously rejoices in hope—such faith, a sign of Christ at work in us, may assault the gates of hell without fear.

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me, wrote Paul in Colossians (4:13). In the past 15 years or so, our parish has endured hardships, disloyalty, schism, budget challenges, obstacles, infrastructure necessities, and a series of Covid-related restrictions affecting our common life and ministries. With God's help we have met, are meeting every challenge. Now we press on! We need not doubt God will bless us. Do you yearn for such blessing? Will we yearn for God's way, God's wisdom, God's heart to be ours? Will we be of the same mind, the same purpose—Christ's mind, Christ's purpose? If the past is indicative, the answer is 'yes!' a resounding 'YES!' God helping us.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving, and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive, be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and for ever. Amen.