

Meditations: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (Day 3)

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18-25 January).

- Unity within the Church
- The order of charity
- Unity in variety

AT THE BEGINNING of the Acts of the Apostles, immediately after Jesus' Ascension, we find this description of the first Christians: *all these with one*

accord devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14). And, a little later, describing the life of that first community, St Luke also tells us that *the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common* (Acts 4:32). On the third day of the Octave for Christian unity, using these quotations from Sacred Scripture, we want to meditate on one of the four notes of the Church: her unity.

Thinking about this unity that was lived by the first followers of Jesus, St Josemaría reminded us that “it is an essential part of the Christian spirit not only to live in union with the ordinary hierarchy – the Pope and the bishops – but also to feel at one with the rest of one’s brothers in the Faith ... We must rekindle the sense of fraternity which was so deeply felt by the early Christians. It will help us

to feel united, while loving at the same time the variety of our individual vocations.”[1] All the baptized are called to foster unity within our Mother the Church and to avoid everything that leads to division, because “unity is a sign of life.”[2] This task must spread throughout the Body of Christ in concentric circles. First we learn to love and live unity in our own family, with those closest to us; then unity within the Church, loving the different charisms inspired by the Holy Spirit; finally, we desire and seek unity also with non-Catholic Christians.

This interior unity is a gift from God which is also backed up by our personal efforts to overcome the barriers and remove the obstacles that hinder it. With our eyes fixed on that unity which the first Christians lived, we ask our Lord for the grace to appreciate the variety that we find

within the Church, through which she “appears as a rich and vital organism not a uniformity, fruit of the one Spirit who leads everyone to profound unity, because she welcomes differences without eliminating them and thus brings about a harmonious unity.”[3]

IN THE SCENES of the Gospel we see how Christ interacts with very different groups of people: with teachers of the Law, with workers, with people He met during religious and social events which took place in the environment He moved in or with the large crowds He preached to. Yet we also witness that, because of circumstances of space and time, not everybody was treated with the same intensity from the human point of view. “Our Lord,” the Prelate of Opus Dei tells us, “often dedicated

longer periods of time to his friends.”[4] Thus we see, for example, that He spends afternoons in the house of Bethany or that He takes time off to be alone with his closest disciples.

Similarly, in our desire for unity among all Christians we cannot forget what St Thomas Aquinas calls the *ordo caritatis*, the order of love, which leads us to be concerned first of all about unity with those who have been more directly entrusted to us in the Church. St Josemaría pointed out that in the Work “we have always loved those who are not Catholic: we love everyone in the world! But with order, with the order of charity. First of all, our brothers and sisters in the faith.”[5]

He based his teaching here on St Paul’s Letter to the Galatians, where the Apostle exhorts us to strive to do good to all, but especially to those

with whom we share the same faith (cf. *Gal* 6:10).

Authentic charity is universal and, at the same time, ordered. When we meditate on unity in the Church, it is natural that our thoughts should be directed first of all to the real communion that we have with our brothers and sisters in the Work, with whom we are united with strong bonds of fraternity, beginning with those we live with in the same house. “Let there be nothing among you that can divide you,”[6] St Ignatius of Antioch insisted. This unity, lived according to the example of Christ, makes us happy and attracts others.

AFTER SPEAKING to the Corinthians about the radical equality of all the members of the Mystical Body of

Christ, St Paul continues: *But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? ... Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues?* (1 Cor 12:18-19, 29-30). The Church exercises her mission through the work of all her children, although in different ways; she needs everyone to carry out the divine plans.

The great variety of vocations and charisms that exist in the Church is “the multiform richness of the Mystical Body, within its divine unity: a single Body with a single Soul; with but one mind, one heart, one way of feeling, one will, one desire. But a multitude of organs and members.”^[7] Within the admirable plurality displayed in the Church’s unity, Our Lord has wanted to establish different ways of serving.

The Second Vatican Council notes in particular that “the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs.”

That is why “it would be a great mistake to confuse unity with uniformity and to insist, for example, on the unity of the Christian vocation, without considering at the same time the diversity of vocations and specific missions which fit within that general call and which develop their multiple aspects for the service of God.”[8] “The important thing,” St Josemaría emphasised, “is for everyone to try to be faithful to their own divine calling. Only thus can we contribute to the Church the benefits deriving from the special charism each has received from God.”[9]

The first Christian community in Jerusalem persevered united in prayer and charity *cum Maria, Matre*

Iesu (Acts 1:14). Around Our Lady, the Church of our time too will also grow in unity if we live together with our brothers and sisters, each one trying to carry out faithfully the mission we have received.

[1] St Josemaría, *Conversations*, 61.

[2] St Josemaría, *The Way*, 940.

[3] Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, 24 January 2010.

[4] Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Letter, 1 November 2019, 2.

[5] St Josemaría, *Instruction*, May 1935-14 September 1950, note 151.

[6] St Ignatius, *Letter to the Magnesians*, 6.

[7] St Josemaría, *Letter 15 August 1953*, 3.

[8] St Josemaría, *Letter 15 August 1953*, 4.

[9] St Josemaría, *Conversations*, 61

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