

Today's Gospel passage comes from the night of the Last Supper, right before Jesus was arrested, beaten and crucified. Jesus had just finished telling the Disciples what was about to happen to him and he prayed for them before they were all scattered by the night's events. He could have prayed for anything for the Disciples at that moment. He could have said, "Father, please give these servants of yours all of the money and worldly goods they will need to support them as they go about your work." He could have said, "Father, please give your servants wisdom and discernment so that they will always know and do your will as they go about your business." But he did not. Instead, he prayed for the thing that is most at the heart of all of God's servants' ability to do ministry – unity between God and human and unity among humans.

Jesus' prayer is for us to be one, just as Jesus is one with God. But that seems like such an impossible thing to pray for. Look at the history of humanity. Shoot, just look at your news feed. There is so much division and enmity in this country today, let alone the rest of the world. Just in the last week we had the shooting of 11 people during a sabbath service and multiple pipe bombs that threatened to kill more than a dozen well known figures. And Jesus prayed for unity among people Let's face it, that is impossible for humans to achieve!

Only God, through the work of Christ Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit can accomplish the unity of humanity. But ... and this a major caveat ... we also need to know how to recognize unity when we see it. I would suggest to you that if you are looking for unity in sameness, you'll never see God's unity.

It is not about sameness. It is not homogeneity that Jesus was praying for. Jesus knew that homogeneity – everything being just alike, without variation – was a bad thing for the Church that was to come. Remember that the early church would have as its leaders such different personalities as Simon Peter, the one they called "Doubting Thomas," James and John (the Sons of Thunder) and Paul of Tarsus. Jesus prayed, not for sameness, but for understanding and relationship; for acceptance and appreciation, each of the other. The unity that Jesus sought for us was the same unity that we might attain with God, based upon God's complete acceptance of and love for us, even with all of our faults and foibles.

Jesus prayed about relationship – ours to God and ours to each other. He did not talk about the majority being right or some test that someone would have to pass before he or she could be part of the unified Church group. That

the relationship Jesus prays for could ever exclude anyone is completely unthinkable. To those who might set up such a situation in order to achieve unity, Jesus points out that the world, with its myriad expressions of diversity is the world God created and ... is the object of God's total love. Jesus says that all people – today as well as in the time of his initial prayer – come within the loving embrace of God and have the promise of basking in the loving glow of God's desired unity.

I came across the following words recently and they say quite eloquently what we are talking about today:

It is easy to find ways to despise what we do not understand, to hate what does not resonate with our own experience, to fear what seems alien. It is harder to seek ways to understand, to broaden our experience and to look with fresh eyes at those who differ from the majority in any number of possible ways. It is hard to accept that each and every one of us is a minority of one kind or another. ... Yet the eyes that are sometimes fresh to us, are the experienced eyes of Jesus Christ, who calls us to unity greater than the sum of our selves. It is a unity made both possible and perfect by the extravagant and abundant love of God.¹

The Elderly and Rheumy-Eyed..., Easter 7C, The Rev. Anthony Jewiss (Episcopal Priest)

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I liken Jesus' vision of unity to my daughter Taylor's box of crayons. Some are new and virtually unused. Some are old with peeling paper. Some are still tall and sharp while some are worn and rounded on the end. But all of them are crayons unified in their purpose, to color the world. Jesus' prayer was not that all the crayons be the same height and hue. His prayer was that all of the crayons might work to the very best of their ability – toward making the world a better, more colorful place.

Jesus prayed for unity of faith, not homogenized faith. Jesus was the example of love for all sorts and conditions of persons. And it is Jesus whom we seek to emulate. God made us all different and unique and Jesus calls us to celebrate those differences and unique features, seeking unity through faith in the true and common God.

Theologian Karl Rahner said, "Only one thing can give unity in the Church on the human level: the love which allows another to be different even when it does not understand him." May the love of Christ, which passes all understanding, abide in our hearts, in a spirit of true unity, this day and always.

In the name of one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.