

This Great Mystery

Session 6. One Body, One Faith, One Baptism

The ascended Christ's victory gifts are people, given so one visible body can grow up into its head.

What We Found

After three chapters of pure gift, Paul finally asked something of us, and it was this: walk worthy of the calling, and be eager to maintain, not manufacture, the unity the Spirit has already given. Every virtue he listed, lowliness, meekness, patience, forbearance, is a virtue you can only practice on real people. The unity he means is the kind with other people in it.

We counted seven "ones" and found the Trinity holding up the list: one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father. And we noticed that the list is not made of abstractions. One baptism happens to a particular person on a particular day, with water. The one body sits beside it with the same solidity.

We chased Paul's Scripture quotation back to its sources and found the surprise of the night: when the conquering Christ ascended on high, the gifts he handed out were people. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are given to the Church the way God once gave the Levites to his sanctuary, and they are given for us, to equip the saints and build up the body until we all reach mature manhood. Since we have visibly not arrived, the gifts have not expired.

And we ended with an anatomy lesson: the body grows from its head and into its head, carried by every joint and ligament, speaking the truth in love. Truth without love wounds; love without truth lies; Paul refuses to let us choose.

Voices of the Church

St. Ignatius of Antioch, d. c. 107

Writing to this very church at Ephesus a generation or two after Paul, while being escorted to his martyrdom in Rome, Ignatius urges the Ephesians to run together in harmony with their bishop, their presbyters attuned to him like the strings of a lyre, so that in their concord and harmonious love Jesus Christ is sung. For Ignatius, visible unity around real, named ministers is not bureaucracy; it is the Church's music.

Letter to the Ephesians, ch. 4. Summary of St. Ignatius of Antioch's teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. The earliest Christians we can hear after the apostles read Ephesians exactly the way tonight's text pushed us: unity has a structure, and the structure exists so Christ can be heard.

St. Cyprian of Carthage, d. 258

He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother.

On the Unity of the Catholic Church, 6.

For the group. Cyprian's blunt sentence lands on tonight's list of ones: the one Father of 4:6 is not reached around the one body of 4:4 but within it.

St. John Henry Newman, d. 1890

Newman teaches that in this world life shows itself by growth: a living idea, like a living body, does not stay frozen

at its first moment but develops toward its full stature, and this growth is not corruption but the very sign that the thing is alive. He applied this to the Church herself, and it helped carry him into her.

An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine. Summary of St. John Henry Newman's teaching, not a direct quotation.

For the group. Verse 13's "until we all attain" means the Church is a body still growing toward maturity; Newman gives us permission to expect development without fearing it means decay.

Live It This Week

Practices

1. Pray daily this week, by name, for one relationship where Christian unity is strained: a Protestant friend, a family member who has left the Church, a Catholic you find hard to forbear. One decade of the Rosary or one sincere minute; the point is the name.
2. Write and actually send a note of thanks to one person who has been a gift to you in the sense of verse 11: a priest, a catechist, a youth minister, the person who first taught you to pray. Two sentences is enough.
3. Practice "speaking the truth in love" once, deliberately: have one honest, kind conversation you have been avoiding, and prepare for it by praying verse 2 over yourself first, lowliness, meekness, patience.

Scripture Memory

Ephesians 4:4-6

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all."

Ephesians 4:4-6

Go Further in the Catechism

- CCC 813. the Church is one because her source, the Trinity, is one
- CCC 815. the visible bonds of unity: one professed faith, common worship, apostolic succession
- CCC 794. Christ the head provides for the body's growth through his gifts
- CCC 866. one Lord, one faith, one baptism
- CCC 1271. baptism is the foundation of communion among all Christians

Before next session. Read Ephesians 4:17-32 before we meet again.