

Homily for the 7th Sunday of Easter

In his first homily as the newly chosen successor of St. Peter, Pope Francis shared the following: “We can walk when we want to, we can build many things, but if we do not witness to Jesus Christ then it doesn't matter. We might become a philanthropic NGO but we wouldn't be the Church, the Bride of the Lord.” Here Pope Francis is highlighting the necessity of witnessing to the love of Jesus, a goal which can only be fully realized through the unity and harmony of those who follow Christ. Jesus Himself puts it this way in our Gospel today from John 17: Father, “I revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world...[but] I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you.” In other words, the unity of believers is essential to the unity of the message witnessed to.

Perhaps some illustrations might help here. For example, if a child misbehaves, but the parents are of different mindsets as to whether or not their child should be punished, this “divided front” weakens whatever choice is made, because the little one sees a lack of agreement on the truth of the situation. Or, take the example of children where one parent comes to Mass with them, while the other stays at home. Again, the children might experience religion and Church as something optional, and the importance of faith is weakened, or at least relativized. Similarly, as the world observes the Church, divided among thousands of denominations itself, it’s no wonder that more and more people in our country are seeing religion as relative and optional, because truth itself is viewed relatively: What’s true for me doesn’t have to be true for you.

But what did Jesus say in the passage just mentioned? “Father, may they be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one.” Well, how are the Father and Son one? They are one in mutual love for one another through the bond of the Holy Spirit shared between them. In other words, the Father didn’t get jealous when Jesus was getting all the attention on Christmas Eve being born. Or Jesus didn’t get resentful of His Father, because it was His will that the cup of suffering not pass from Him. And the Holy Spirit doesn’t feel cheated, because He has to wait until Pentecost to get shared with the Apostles. It’s not about self-focus or narcissism – it’s about other-centered, sacrificial love, which is the very identity of who God is.

And my friends, until we have come to experience the love of God for us in a personal way, we will not be able to understand the mystery of divine love bound up in the holy Trinity. But neither will we be able to fully understand what it means to be united with one another in the Body of Christ. Love is what binds us together – not necessarily the feelings of love, or whether or not we even like another person. Rather, the love that is a choice to seek the good of others and sacrifice for them – because such love is the only thing that really brings us unity, and therefore true peace, in life. And so, may the Holy Communion we share together today help to bring us all into greater communion with one another – in our families and friendships, in our parish, and in the Body of Christ, the Church. God bless you.