

Sunday 18th January 2025

The Second Sunday of Epiphany / Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Gospel Reading

John 1:29-42

The Lamb of God

The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, “After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.” I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.’ And John testified, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.’

The First Disciples of Jesus

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which translated means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come and see.’ They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter).

Other Readings: Isaiah 49:1-7 Psalm 40:1-12 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Homily

In Christian life, Unity is not some abstract idea, it is a calling for the whole Church, and rooted in the life of the Church, bound in grace and fed by the encounter with Christ.

In John’s Gospel, unity begins with recognition. John the Baptist points to Jesus and declares, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” This is not just a statement of his identity; it is a moment of gathering, a point where all can come together. Two of John’s disciples hear these words and follow Jesus. Their movement toward Christ is the first step into a new covenant. They do not yet fully understand who Jesus is, though Andrew does call Jesus the Messiah, but they are drawn together by a shared hope inspired by Him.

Unity, in this sense, is not created by shared opinions or strategies or even agreement – this isn’t simply a case of like-minded people banding together. This act of unity happens through a common orientation toward, and experience of Christ. This unity deepens through relationship.

“What are you looking for?” asks Jesus. It is a personal question, asked in the presence of others. The disciples respond, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” and Jesus replies, “Come and see.” Here we see how unity grows - when people are invited not just to believe something about Jesus, but to remain with Him, to spend time with the Lord. Andrew, having spent time with Christ, immediately seeks out his brother Simon and brings him to Jesus. When rooted in encounter, unity is contagious; it naturally expands outward, drawing others into the same life-giving relationship.

Saint Paul, writing to the Corinthians, addresses a community struggling to live out this unity. He begins not with criticism, but with gratitude. He thanks God for the grace given to them in Christ Jesus, affirming that they have been enriched in every way and are not lacking in any spiritual gift. Paul reminds them, and us, that unity is not grounded in human perfection, but in divine faithfulness. “God is faithful,” he says, “by whom you were called into fellowship with his Son.” The Church’s unity does not depend on our ability to agree on everything, but on God’s unwavering commitment to those He loves. He is the focus that binds us together.

These readings show us that unity is both a gift and a responsibility. Unity is given by God when we are called into fellowship with His Son, and it is sustained when we continue to point one another toward Christ, as John the Baptist did. Losing sight of the Lamb of God, focussing on anything less than Jesus and his message and mission is what will divide us. Unity is restored when we return to that first question asked by Christ, “What are you looking for?”. Our answer – together we seek what Jesus seeks.

The pursuit of unity in our families, parishes, and wider Church, may seem difficult but we are not asked to manufacture it. We are asked to behold Christ, to remain with Him, and to trust in the faithfulness of God who calls us together. In doing so, we become, not a collection of individuals, but one people drawn into communion by the Lamb of God. We become the body of Christ.

Conversation Questions

1. What are we looking for in our own encounters with Christ?
2. What helps our community keep Christ at the centre of our relationships, and what distracts us?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*Almighty God,
in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives
make known your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

(or)

*Eternal Lord,
our beginning and our end:
bring us with the whole creation
to your glory, hidden through past ages
and made known
in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

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