

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13) – Year B – August 5, 2009 - Homily
2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a; Psalm 51:1-13; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35
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Written and performed by the rock band U2, *One* is ranked as one of the top 100 greatest songs of all time according to *Rolling Stone* magazine. One section of the lyrics says this, “We’re one/ But we’re not the same / We get to carry each other....” Lead singer Bono is quoted on one website as saying this about the song, “It is a song about coming together, but it's not the old hippie idea of 'Let's all live together.' It is, in fact, the opposite. It's saying, we are one, but we're not the same. ... we have to get along together in this world if it is to survive.” Like many of U2’s songs, there is a strong spiritual theme in their lyrics. Amazingly enough, the band was on the verge of breaking up when this song was written, reminding the group that conflict is a part of life. It does not hide the difficulties and the pain of disagreement, but recognizes that there is an overarching power and principle that calls us to unity, especially within the Body of Christ. Almost two thousand years ago, Paul urged the church to hear the same message: one of unity in diversity, and putting others before ourselves.

I’m sure you noticed that this evening’s passage from Ephesians is full of the word “one”. It actually appears seven times, in what is often called the seven unities of the church. One body, the body of Christ. One Spirit, the innervating power within the church. One hope, our blessed inheritance of redemption. One Lord, our sovereign Lord Jesus. One faith, the Gospel message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. One baptism, how we are all initiated as members of the Body of Christ, the church, and raised with Christ to new life. One God and Father of all. Did you recognize the opening sentences from the baptismal liturgy? Along with the theme of the centrality of Christ, the unity of the church and our sanctification as believers and followers of Christ is all a part of what Paul is dealing with in this letter to the church. It is exciting stuff indeed – we don’t have to guess how to live out our calling, Paul has just given us the sevenfold framework within which we lovingly exercise our gifts and ministry. The process is one that is common to all believers, becoming a part of the Body, discerning the gifts of God, and then the steady and dynamic change into Christ-likeness that is our sanctification.

Let’s look at what Paul says about the overarching characteristics of the community of believers who are the Body of Christ, the church. It is God’s desire that the church be a witness to the world of God’s love, unity, and peace – each are fundamental characteristics of God. God is love. God is a Trinity of persons in unity. And God’s gift is peace: the peace that passes all understanding, including the knowledge of salvation, harmony, and freedom from internal and external strife. Unconditional love is the key to the exercise of our gifts, where the goal of our words and deeds is to work towards unity and building up the Body of Christ. Given the divisive nature of so many of the exchanges between different arms and legs of the Body of Christ, between Christian denominations, and even amongst members of specific faith communities, we clearly have a long way to go in repairing the foundations that God and Jesus set for us.

Individually and as a community, the process we are all undergoing after baptism is called sanctification, otherwise known as the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in transforming our hearts and minds into Christ-likeness. The process leads us to maturity in Christ, even as we are all working out our own salvation. We are all blessed with a diverse array of gifts, and we are all at different points in our personal pilgrimages. Nonetheless, our common call is to seek out a deeper relationship with Jesus, our Lord and Savior. In this sense, love is not an emotional

response, but an act of God's grace in guiding us to make good choices, and grow into the virtues that Paul describes for us. Walking worthily with Christ, means that by God's grace we may make conscious daily decisions to be humble, to be gentle, to be patient, and to bear with one another, in all our relationships. This is not some artificial utopian existence, where we members of the Body will never disagree, but one where we respect the dignity of all, whilst seeking to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by putting others before ourselves.

Just as the U2 song tells us, we are one, but we are not the same, and we get to carry each other. We are one in Christ, but we are all blessed with different gifts that complement those of others. I know I'm not gifted in hospitality, for example, but I belong to this community where we have many who are so gifted. And my gifts are therefore just as necessary, albeit different. Each of our gifts is meant to be used to "equip the saints to build up the Body of Christ". The word "equip" is very interesting indeed. In the Greek it literally means "the setting of a bone", with derivations from verbs like to reconcile, restore, create and prepare. Look around this community, isn't it awesome to know that those in our community with the gift of hospitality create space for God's grace, bring us together in fellowship and therefore restore relationships. Those with the gift of teaching, prepare us all with knowledge to share our faith confidently. Our gifted musicians, who sing in our choir and play for us, create a joyful and prayerful worship experience, as do the ministers of our altar guild and worship team. Those who give of their time to help set up major events like the rummage sale are an incredible blessing, because their gifts are converted into even greater blessings for the broader community – giving life, showing God's love to the world. These are all ultimately works of God's grace, where diversity is honored and gifts are given to the glory of God in order to build up the Body, and to create ever-expanding enclaves that resemble the peaceful kingdom, that is the kingdom of God.

To grow in ministry is to align our whole selves with God's intentions both individually, and corporately. The gift of healthy relationships is mutuality. To bear with one another in love is to give of ourselves sacrificially for the sake of another. In so doing, we are building a new community -- unlike the world -- where all people are welcome and essential. Here's what one biblical scholar says about our reading from Ephesians: "Christ's Body is that place at the intersection of divine and human life where sovereignty, brokenness, and communion are held together in God's grace." Ultimately, we must rest all our brokenness in God's grace because in our humanity, the evidence within and without the Body of Christ suggests that we simply cannot seem to give up our need to compete, to hurt, to bicker and fight, and to get over our astonishing lack of humility before God. Putting others before ourselves is a huge challenge. We are one, and we're not the same, yet we are blessed to carry each other. Since it is what God requires, we can be sure that it is nothing less than transformational for us, for the Body of Christ, and for the world.

Amen.