

We are One In Christ

The celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Winnipeg Metropolia of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada is a time of grace, a very special time to reflect seriously – as Church and as individual faithful – on our Christian vocation, and to make a serious effort to respond to Jesus' invitation to draw closer to him.

We now continue our series of spiritual reflections, which are an important part of our Jubilee celebrations aimed at our spiritual renewal.

Today, every Ukrainian Catholic parish throughout Canada joins together to reflect upon the theme of "We are One in Christ."

Themes: Infallible sign of God's loving presence; Begins in our heart; Through Christ.

Infallible Sign of God's Loving Presence

"By this will they know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Every Christian community, be it an eparchy, a parish, a family, is a community of love that bears witness to God's loving presence in the world, so that others might believe and experience his love and be in communion with Him.

Prior to his passion Jesus prayed for this communion of love. "Father . . . I pray that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be one with us, that the world may believe you sent me." (Jn 17:21) By virtue of our baptism all of us have the responsibility of praying and striving for communion in Christ.

One of the dominant and intensively discussed themes at the Second Vatican Council was, "Reconciliation and Union of all Christians." But it is difficult to look forward to the union of all Christians, when divisions exist in our own eparchies, parishes, and families, which means that we must begin at home, with ourselves.

In his Encyclical, "Evangelization in the Modern World," Pope Paul VI, refers to the family as a domestic church.

Like the local church, so too the family is the environment in which we first hear the Good News, and become witnesses of God's loving presence. In other words our Christian - spiritual formation begins in the family.

Living Out of the Center

During the rite of baptism the priest gives a lighted candle to the newly baptized person and says "Take this lighted candle, and strive throughout your entire lifetime to shine brightly with the light of faith and of good works, so that when the Lord comes you

can, together with all the wise and holy ones, go forth to meet Him and enter unhindered into the hall of his heavenly glory, and dwell with him forever.”

St. Augustine said: “It is Christ alone who baptizes, confirms, forgives, and heals. And Jesus is the center of the mystical life. We are sons and daughters of Abba only in Christ Jesus; we inherit the Kingdom only in Christ Jesus. Christian mysticism is essentially a personal relationship in which one member is a human being and the other is the eternal God revealed in Jesus.”

A Christian community is one whose members live out of the center, which is Jesus, who is the center of the Good News; who is the Good News.

Consequently the Christian community is one that strives to become like Jesus, and does the works of Christ; the works of compassion, forgiveness, sacrificial love.

A Praying Community

But as members of a Christian community we also know that without Christ we do nothing; which means that we are a community that essentially prays. Not only privately, but also together, at the Divine Liturgy, which is the central act of Catholic worship, where we come to adore Jesus Christ our King and our God; where we listen attentively to the Living Word of God, and profess our love for one another, that with one mind and one heart we may profess the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the consubstantial and undivided Trinity.

It is here, at the Eucharistic Celebration, the Sacrament of Love, in an atmosphere of prayer, that we become one with Christ and with each other. It is here at the Eucharist that we are nourished with the Bread of Life that gives us strength, the love of Christ that transforms us into his likeness and allows us to love as he loves, unconditionally, without judgment or condemnation, accepting everyone and forgiving everyone. This is the love that gives us the strength to remain faithful to Jesus.

It is at the Eucharist that we celebrate our commitment to Christ, and to each other and to work tirelessly at love and compassion. It is for this reason that Jesus tells us to celebrate the Eucharist in his memory, in memory of his tremendous love, and to remember that he is always with us.

Commitment to Christ

In one of his letters to the Christians in Corinth St. Paul writes: “Be alert, stand firm in the faith, be brave and strong.” Do all your work in love. (1 Cor 16:13). In other words Paul was reminding the newborn Christians in Corinth to be faithful to their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It hadn't been that long since they had turned their life over to Jesus and promised to be faithful to him. But now it seems as though they were running into difficulties and having serious problems, and just really having a rough time remaining faithful to their commitment to Jesus.

We would do well to take Paul's words seriously, and examine carefully our own commitment to Jesus, and see how faithful we are to Jesus and to his way of life. Because we live under similar pressures as did the Christians in Paul's time; so much so, that if we really believe in Christ and live according to his teaching, we too, can expect being looked upon as fanatics, fools, and ridiculed.

Jesus has chosen us out of the world, we have responded to his call to live our lives differently, radically differently. We have renounced Satan, and the ways of a sinful world. We have united ourselves with Christ, and believe in him.

If we, as a Christian community, persevere in our commitment to Christ, and remain faithful to him, we too, can expect to be hated, persecuted, and ridiculed by the world, just as Jesus was; because Jesus' way is diametrically opposed to the way of the world.

Jesus says: Happy are the poor and humble in spirit. The world says: Happy are the proud and arrogant.

Jesus says: Forgive your brothers and sisters. The world says: No! Get even! Don't let them get away with it!

Jesus says: Be fair and just, share your goods and possessions with others. The world says: Don't be stupid. Give away only what you can't use, and even then be careful.

Jesus says: Gather up treasures in Heaven. The world says: Stop dreaming; get all you can out of this life.

So we really do need to take the words of Paul seriously, to be alert, to wake up and realize who we really are, to whom we have committed our lives, and to resolve to stand firm and be strong in our faith, to fix our eyes on Jesus, and to live our lives out of his tremendous love that is in our hearts. Because without Jesus we can do nothing.

Community Begins in the Hearts of its Members

The Pharisees, in the time of Jesus, were staunch defenders of their faith, and the traditions of their people. But, when Jesus appeared in their midst, they rejected him. They said: "We have a law, and according to this law he must die."

We, too, reject Jesus when focusing our attention on the externals of our Faith: our rituals, customs and traditions, we neglect the one thing necessary – LOVE.

The evangelist John states: "He who says he loves God, whom he cannot see, but hates, or simply neglects his brother whom he does see, is a liar." One who has no love for the brother he has seen, cannot love the God he has not seen. (1 Jn 20:21)

Therefore, the Christian community is one where compassion, forgiveness, and unconditional love are clearly evident. It is a place where everyone is welcome and can feel at home; especially the poor, the weak, wounded, handicapped, and heavily burdened; those who feel lost, forgotten, those for whom life has no meaning. The Christian community is one that is mindful of the Divine Presence, is in touch with God

and neighbor, follows Jesus on his path of love, and gives clear witness to the presence of Jesus in our midst, so that others may believe.

Jubilee Prayer

Lord, Jesus Christ, as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Ukrainian Catholic Metropolia, we give thanks for your loving kindness and the abundant graces received during the span of fifty years.

We also humbly ask for the grace of an ever deeper realization of your loving presence; that we are all children of one Heavenly Father.

Again and again, we pray for the grace of perseverance in faith; that we may all be united in your loving and compassionate heart, and that with renewed enthusiasm, love and compassion, we might continue the work of salvation for the glory of our Heavenly Father.

May your holy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven! Amen.