

Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost (Sept. 27)

Mark 9, 37-42. 44. 46-47 (Greek 9, 38-43. 45. 47-48) (*)

Christians Unite!

The Ecumenism you have been hearing about began from a scandal. Not the kind of scandal people usually talk about, that is, anything that offends established moral concepts and disgraces all who are associated with it. We speak of scandal in the original sense, that is, an obstacle that bars the way to faith or the practice of Christian virtues.

Christian missionaries in Africa and Asia noticed that people hesitated about becoming Christians because they were confused by many Christian sects. All the missionaries claimed to preach the Christian religion, yet people heard one type of religion from missionaries of sect A and another type of religion from missionaries of sect B. Most of all, the missionaries preached love and unity, and yet they fought each other; instead of loving one another, they never even greeted each other.

People were scandalized, and rightly so. The missionaries failed to show themselves as true disciples of Christ who said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13,35). He also said, "May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me" (John 17,21).

God, who made light come from darkness, inspired Christian missionaries to do something to heal the division among Christians, and so the Ecumenical Movement was born. The Second Vatican Council helped very much by making the promotion of unity among Christians

* For the different numbering of the verses, see the note in the previous homily. Note further that verses 43 and 45 in the Vulgate (corresponding to verses 44 and 46 in the Greek) is omitted in modern Greek editions as well as in the Jerusalem Bible (but not in the RSV). The omitted verses are judged to be glosses that repeat verse 47 (Vulgate) or 48 (Greek).

one of its chief concerns (Decree on Ecumenism, no. 1). It reminded us that "concern for restoring unity pertains to the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike" (ibid. no. 5).

This Sunday, my dear friends, the Gospel reading gives us food for thought regarding the practice of ecumenism. Anyone who respects the name of Christ cannot be against us and "anyone who is not against us is for us."

The second part of the reading, which exhorts us to "cut off" whatever may be a cause of sin for us, is also applicable to Ecumenism. Perhaps, not so much to external Ecumenism, but to what the Second Vatican Council calls "spiritual Ecumenism" (Decree on Ecumenism, no. 8). When we live sinful lives, "the radiance of the Church's face shines less brightly in the eyes of our separated brethren and of the world at large, and the growth of God's kingdom is retarded" (ibid. no. 4). This is the scandal that we must avoid at all cost. "Let all Christ's faithful remember that the more purely they strive to live according to the gospel, the more they are fostering and even practicing Christian Unity. For they can achieve depth and ease in strengthening mutual brotherhood to the degree that they enjoy profound communion with the Father, the Word and the Spirit" (ibid. no. 7).

Modern revolutions have been characterized by a call for unity. "Workers unite!" was a cry that led to a worldwide revolution. "Students unite!" is a cry that is now stirring up revolution in our urban society. Can we also start the much awaited and much needed Christian Revolution with the cry, "Christians unite?" We can — if we begin by integrating our own lives first and then joining hands with all who are not against us.

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