

3rd Sunday per Annum - A
Isaiah 9:1-4;
I Corinthians 1:10-13, 17-18;
Matthew 4:12-23
Little Flower - 1/22/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

Last Sunday we began a series of readings from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians that will continue until Lent.

To understand these readings, we have to place them in context. One of our Christian myths is that the early Christian church was the ideal church, and today's Church should be more like the early Church. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians destroys that myth. Throughout this letter, Paul addressed various ecclesial, doctrinal, and moral issues that had already arisen within the Christian community at Corinth. As we listen to these readings over the next several weeks, our challenge is to relate the ecclesial, doctrinal, and moral issues that Paul addressed to our own times and to the Church today, especially to our own parish.

In today's reading, Paul addressed the problem of divisions within the Corinthian community. It would appear that various people in the Corinthian community were identifying themselves with the various leaders of the community, and this was dividing the community. We need to apply this to the Church today and to our parish.

Although there are no significant divisions in our parish, there are some real divisions within the Church. For example, there are individuals and groups in the larger church and in some parishes who see themselves as the true believers. They see themselves as better Catholics and more Catholic than everyone else. Everyone who does not believe and practice exactly as they do is not a true Catholic.

Another area of division within the larger Church is in the area of moral values and practice. Monday will mark the forty-fourth anniversary of *Roe v Wade*, the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion. As a Church called to witness Gospel values to the world, we need to strive to create more unity within the Church on this key moral issue. The Church is called to proclaim the Gospel of Life to the world, but the Church can only do this effectively if the Church speaks with one voice. However, this will require a willingness to listen to each other, a willingness to dialogue with each other, and a willingness to presume good faith on each other's part. Charity is required of all good Christians.

When we talk about divisions in the Church, we also have to look at the divisions among Christians: Catholics, Orthodox, Episcopalians, Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Evangelicals, and literally hundreds more. However, in his Priestly Prayer at the Last Supper, Jesus prayed, *that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me* [John 17:21]. People from mission lands have often written that the divisions among Christians are the biggest barrier to the proclamation of the Gospel.

Each year from January 18th to January 25th the Church celebrates the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which was formerly called the Church Unity Octave. Let us pray, then, for Christian unity throughout the world. Again, Christian unity will never happen without a willingness to listen to each other, a willingness to dialogue with each other, and a willingness to presume good faith on each other's part.

My brothers and sisters, I think this year most of us are more aware of the divisions within our country than of the divisions within our Church and among the Christian churches. The recent presidential election brought out the worst in us as a country and exacerbated the divisions already present among us. However, notwithstanding the divisions, on Friday there was the peaceful, orderly transition of executive power from President Obama to President Trump that is the hallmark of our Republic. Nevertheless, the divisions remain. To help overcome these divisions, we as Christians, whatever our political views, have to set an example of willingness to listen to those with whom we differ, a willingness to dialogue with those with whom we differ, and a willingness to presume good faith on the part of those with whom we differ.