

United by the One Who Calls

3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year A

Isaiah 8:23-9:3
Psalms 27:1, 4, 13-14

*1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17***
Matthew 4:12-23

Shortly after arriving at my first assignment, I was approached by one of the parishioners who asked me, rather pointedly, "Are you an orthodox priest, or are you a heretic?" In another place, I was not asked, but instructed, "Father, you will eventually learn that we are more liberal in this parish" and proceeded to tell me which teachings of the Church they did not want to hear. A friend was once asked by a woman in his parish, "Are you a Marian priest?" (whereupon I believe he answered, "No, I'm from Highland Park.") Finally, there is scarcely a priest who has never heard either praise or criticism from parishioners that was not based in some part on the memory of a previous priest who had at one time served at the particular location.

Divisions, factions, differences in style, opinion, outlook or even (can you imagine!) taste have, no doubt, been a part of every institution since the dawn of human civilization (maybe even before). The Church is no exception, nor does she pretend to be.

Over the last few years, comparisons have been made between Pope Francis and the retired Pope Benedict, with some indicating a preference of one or the other,

usually in the comparative sense. Parishes can be divided between those who are close to the current pastor and those who long for the "glory days" of a previous one. Even clergy often grin or glower over having gotten one vicar over another, or one bishop over another, or who is to be considered the ideal model of priesthood in a given region or diocese. Catholics like to classify themselves as liberal or conservative, traditional or progressive, Marian, Eucharistic, of this Mass time or that Mass time, in an endless list of classifications where Jesus is roaming aimlessly somewhere between "me", the Blessed Mother, the Pope and Mother Angelica.

St. Paul was no stranger to this phenomenon. No doubt, Paul, too, had to deal with Christians who regularly reminded him, "that is not the way Apollos did it!" or "I remember the good old days when Cephas was our leader!" or "we sure miss it, Paul, when you were our Apostle!" There may even have been those who regularly asserted, "I am sure this is the way Jesus would have done it!" His First Letter to the Corinthians (1:12) demonstrates that there are some things about Christians that clearly will never change.



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In response, Paul simply reminds us, not of what divides, but of who unites; that it was not Paul, nor Apollos, but *Christ* who died for us. It is not this pastor or that pastor, but *Christ* who calls us to be baptized. It is not this bishop or that bishop, but *Christ* who took up the message of John the Baptist to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand". It is not Pope Francis or Benedict, but *Christ* who calls us to preach, and who guides and gathers us into a Church that is Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and ONE. Whether Popes, bishops, priest or faithful -- all are called in deference to the ONE who calls us to "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." This is not a Marian

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message that Paul gives us; nor is it liberal or conservative, orthodox or progressive, modern or old-fashioned. It is a basic Christian truth.

During one of his Wednesday audiences, Pope Francis evoked a cheer from the people, who proceeded to repeatedly shout his name. In response, the Holy Father diverted from his text and earnestly admonished the crowd, "*non Francesco, non Francesco! -- Cristo! Cristo!*

Cristo!"; whereupon they proceeded to cheer even louder.

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