

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in OT: Year A – 2020

[Is 8:23-9:3; Ps27:1, 4, 13-14; 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17; Mt 4:12-23]

There are approximately 41,000 different Christian denominations in the world. Indeed, a staggering number when you consider that we all claim to be followers of Jesus. Before his Ascension, Jesus prayed that we be one. How did this happen when St. Paul said we are many parts of one body?

Division perhaps lies in the heart of every human; we were divided against God and each other since the Garden of Eden. In the second reading, we see divisions among the Corinthians; some want to follow Apollos, some like Peter better, and still others are true to Paul. Paul tried to restore harmony saying, *“I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose.”* We do indeed share three common goals with other denominations: we must be reborn in baptism, we strive to follow Christ, and we desire the same destination: Heaven.

In the first reading, the territories of Zebulun and Naphtali were the first to experience division when the Assyrian empire conquered and exiled the Israelites. The Prophet Isaiah spoke this message of hope: *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”* That light would not shine for over seven hundred years until Jesus began his healing ministry in the exact same location. Christ did not do it alone. St. Therese of Lisieux wrote: *“Jesus ... wills that we have a share with him in the salvation of souls. He wills to do nothing without us.”* God calls us to share in his work, essentially to “catch people” for the kingdom of God by allowing the light of Christ to shine through us. That is why St. Mathew writes in chapter 5:16, *“... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”*

God has called us together to be a Church. Standing outside of Caesarea Philippi, before rock cliffs decorated with altars to pagan gods, Jesus said, *“You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church...”* The word church, in Greek, *ekklesia*, means *“called out from.”* Therefore: 1) there must be a caller; 2) we are called out from something; and, 3) there is something new that we are being called to accomplish.

The Church is not an organization of like-minded thinkers or some club that meets each weekend. We may cherish freedom and creating our own destiny, but in reality we did not decide to join the Church, we were personally summoned by Christ.

Jesus said, *“It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit ...”* The Second Vatican Council called the Church *“the kingdom of God now present in mystery.”* Standing in the Apostles’ presence, Jesus said, *“Behold, the kingdom of God is among you.”* Even St. Augustine pointed out: *“Christ and the Church are two in one flesh.”* Therefore, when the Church is splintered so is Christ’s presence on Earth.

Jesus’ call throughout the centuries is this: *“Follow me.”* Pope St. John Paul II commented, *“This is a call . . . to follow the paths of the Gospel in the direction of a better world.”* If the word ‘Church’ means ‘called out from,’ what are we being called from? The bible says we are called out of the world. The world stands for all that is opposed to God, for all counterfeits to genuine love, and all paths that do not lead to life. This is why, according to Pope St. John Paul, the Church is engaged in an ongoing *“struggle for the world’s soul.”*

If we are called from something, then there must be something new that we are being called to accomplish. St. Paul referred to the Church’s members as living stones or parts of one body of Christ. Thus we are incorporated into something much greater than our self. We were chosen to be a Church for the same reason that the Israelites were God’s first chosen people, not for personal glory, but to attract and draw together the whole world into the knowledge and worship of God. This work of gathering people, throughout salvation history, has met with disobedience, disputes, idolatry, jealousy, and apathy. The Catechism calls the Church *“the family of God,”* and what family has not experienced division? As a family related by the blood of Christ, perhaps it’s time to call upon Christ once again to heal divisions among Christians. For Jesus promised, *“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.”*

The Church exists to draw people who wait in darkness back to communion with God and one another. We are called to be that magnetic force drawing people back into one undivided Body of Christ. For Pope St. John Paul II said, the Church exists to engage the world in a *“dialogue of salvation”* by proposing to the world: *“You are far, far greater than you imagine.”*

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