

One

If you ask any Dominican friar “What are the four transcendentals?”, he will probably scratch his head and think back to his metaphysics class; with any luck, you will get this answer: the one, the good, the true, and the beautiful. Strangely, my mind has been wandering back to my days as a student brother, and I have been meditating on those four qualities.

What comes to mind immediately is the first of these: “one”. Perhaps this is because, during the month of January, we have the annual “Week of Prayer for Christian Unity”. Christian unity seems such a distant and elusive dream! We seem to be going in the exact opposite direction. Examples abound. About a month or so ago, the world was treated to a scandalous spectacle: “turf wars” led monks of two different Churches to beat one another up in one of the holiest Christian shrines – the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. When discussing this situation with an Iraqi friar, I learned of another example: “Christians in Iraq are having a hard enough time just surviving, but that doesn’t keep our depleted Churches from squabbling. Do you think that helps us?” So much for the 1970’s folk-guitar classic “They’ll know we are Christians by our love”!

We Ukrainians do not need to look so far afield to find examples of disunity. I would bet my stipend that every Ukrainian community served by this newspaper has experienced a shake-up – if not indeed a break-up. It’s not like we’re unaware of the harm we are doing to ourselves, either; after all, we sing the following wise words in a favorite hymn: “In unity is the strength of a people; God grant us unity.” Perhaps we don’t realize what we’re singing, or perhaps we sing those words while pointing an accusing finger at “them” – and we all know who “they” are. In the end, our unity goes out the window, evicted by our selfishness and stubbornness, and we end up disconnected and alone. Perhaps this is what is meant by the 1970’s group *Three Dog Night* when they say that “One is the loneliest number...”

Of course, “one” is lonely if it means being alone; however that is not what Christ intends for us. Listen to how the evangelist John recalls Christ’s words at the Last Supper:

I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, so 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. And I have given them the glory that You gave Me, so that they may be one as We are one, I in them and You in Me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that You sent Me, and that You loved them even as You loved Me.
(John 17: 20-23)

St. Paul reinforces this in his first letter to Corinthians:

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of the one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. ... God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as He intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts but one body. ... Now you are Christ’s Body, and individually parts of it. (1 Cor. 12: 12-14, 18-20, 27)

If only we, who together make up the Body of Christ on earth, would learn a lesson from our earthly bodies and begin to work together for the well-being of all concerned – our own as well as that of those around us!

We as Church are intended to be a living icon of the Trinity, of the One God Who is nonetheless Three. The Three Persons are One God because They are united in love; we can only be One Church if we let ourselves be united in the same way. Believe it or not, we will all be the stronger for it: like the individual wires making up a strong cable, we can bear the weight if we cling together.

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