

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

I was struck this week by the second reading from Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

**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.** (I Corinthians 1:10)

Division.

Isn't it amazing how, even from the beginning, the Church has been plagued with divisions? It is part of our brokenness, I guess. There is something in us that wants to be part of the "right camp," to "win" (whatever *that* means). We want to hook up with people who know what they are doing, what they are saying, because, after all, we're judged by the company we keep. Saint Paul speaks against this today. We are to associate with Christ; *He* is the center of our identity, not a particular person or sect. Jesus prayed very strongly for unity on the night before He died (see John 17). To be in union with each other, my ego must be set aside to be united with another's. In Christianity, we do not pick up another human person's ideas, thoughts or ideals, but Almighty God's! This is important: it is not that we set aside *the Truth* so that we can be of one mind and heart, but that we give up our *own ideas*, uniting ourselves to Christ's mind and heart. If all Christians do this, we will be of the same mind and same purpose with each other.

In my reflection on what causes divisions in my own life, I have noticed how subtle, yet how deep division goes. It can start with a small wound. Someone might say something to me – maybe on purpose, maybe it was just misunderstood – and I end up hurt. If I ignore it or try to brush it aside, what happens?

Maybe at first nothing happens. It may slowly fester deep within me, so that the next time that person says something to me I get defensive if I feel like I am going to be "attacked" again.

Or maybe I find myself playing out scenarios in my mind: "I should have said this back to him" "if only I had done this" "I'll bet he meant *this* . . . by what he said." Over and over, around and around the scenarios go, maybe keeping me from sleep, and definitely keeping me from peace! I probably will then ponder how I will approach the person the next time, playing out any number of conversations in my mind. If I am in a crumby mood, this conversation might involve a number of nasty "zingers" so I can really *get* the person. The irony is that in all my years, even decades, of doing this, never once have any of my scenarios played out the way I wanted or expected them to. You would think I would learn by now that I am not a good predictor of the future!

Neither of these approaches lead to unity, and certainly not to *peace*!

Division!

So how should I handle this? From the first (or at least as soon as I recognize it), I should recognize in my heart that I was hurt. This is important. If I try to play it down, ignore it or bury it, it may end up just becoming fodder for future pain. *Acknowledgment* that I am hurt needs to come first. Then – and this is the hard part – making the choice, with the help of Jesus, to forgive the person. Forgiveness breaks the power of division. Let me say that again . . . ***forgiveness breaks the power of division!*** It does not pretend there is no wound. Forgiveness acknowledges the *very real* wound that is there. To ignore is to let fester. But – and this is a big "but" – forgiveness to say, "I will NOT hold onto my right for revenge, for retribution." Forgiveness lets go of my small ego that was hurt to embrace the infinitely large love of God. Forgiveness brings unity. Forgiveness brings peace!

Division so easily happens because all we have to do is instill a sense of entitlement, or jealousy, or haughtiness, or hurt, or, or, or . . . well, or any number of other things that puts MY way above that of Christ's. This day, may we truly work for unity, driving out the things that allows division to enter. Let us start with ourselves, actively forgiving – with the help of Jesus – the wounds in our lives, so that we may have peace, so that we may have unity.