

## **Homily – United with One Another**

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I dream of a world in which we are united again with one other. I can imagine a world in which we look with affection at our differences. I believe in a world in which we see God in all and around all. I dream of a world in which we can see how extensive God's love is for all of creation and for all people.

Two days ago, on Friday a 24-hour livestream event was held that concluded last night. "The Call to Unite" had two hundred individual segments, each of which lasted between thirty seconds and twenty-five minutes. Some segments were pre-recorded and some were live. Most were done in homes to respect best practices for physical distancing and hygiene. Actors, politicians, musicians, artists, writers, professional athletes, and religious leaders were among the two hundred presenters. Oprah Winfrey kicked it all off, and even some of our past U.S. Presidents took part. I have gotten hooked on watching the livestream.

As its name implies "The Call to Unite" showcased things that brings us together. Spiritual leaders provided many of the segments in which they talked about tools that we already have in our tool box to bring us together rather than divide us. In this time of Coronavirus, in this time of sacrifice for the common good, in this time in which we are physically separated, it is healthy for us to focus on the many things that bring us together in unity.

Today's Gospel reading has Jesus using two related metaphors. In the first, Jesus is the shepherd who leads the sheep in and out of the gate. Jesus cares for the sheep, and the sheep identify with their shepherd.

In the second metaphor, Jesus is the gate. Like a door, the gate controls who goes in or out. And for some, this means that Jesus is the great divider. Jesus divides the sheep from the goats. Jesus separates the wheat from the chafe. Jesus judges some as worthy and lets them in, and he judges others as unworthy and he keeps them out. For some, there is great comfort in having Jesus as the great divider. He is the gate that keeps those others out so that we can remain untainted by the dirty people.

Now, I am not one of those who sees Jesus as the great divider. That view would go against my view of our Triune God, and my understanding of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Instead, for me God is the great uniter - the ultimate connector.

We have a God who created all and declared it good.

We have Christ who is throughout the universe as the perfect combination of spirit and matter.

We have a Holy Spirit who connects all things in that universe, and certainly connects all people.

We have a God of unlimited grace and mercy whose very nature is to love us unconditionally.

And, when we look at Jesus as the great connector we see a gate that is open to all. It is open to all irrespective of whether a person has been good or bad.

This is a gate that has qualities of grace and mercy. This is a gate which includes all, welcomes all, and invites all.

Today, I want to invite you to let go of any notion of God that divides us, and instead embrace the certainty that we have a God who unites. We are united to God and we are united to one another.

That is a message of hope that is needed by many of us as we shelter at home during this time of sacrifice for the common good.

Now, when we have Jesus as the gate of union, then we can look around and see that we have been gather together with people who are very different than we are.

We often surround ourselves with people who are already like us, but Jesus calls us to reach out and be in union with the other. Jesus calls us to be connected to our enemies. During his lifetime, Jesus was constantly reaching out and connecting to the people around him, but sometimes we reject being united, especially with people that bring out the worst in us, or we bring out the worst in them.

In his book "The Great Divorce" C.S. Lewis tells the story of a bus load of people who travel from hell to heaven. And, some of the people who had the blessing of traveling to heaven get back on the bus and go back to hell because they saw people in heaven that they didn't want to be around. Resentment and trauma can lead a person away from God because we can't stand that they would be connected to someone like that. We reject unity with God and others because our wounds hurt so much.

Is it any wonder why Jesus taught so much about forgiveness and healing? Our false self and wounded ego cause us to reject unity with God and others and move back toward separation and division. Sometimes we prefer a Jesus who is a gate that divides us. What part of your own history causes you to prefer division? Who are the

voices in your own life that lead to division? Can you silence these voices? Can you turn off that noise so that you can focus on unity?

Now, since most of us self select to watch things in our own bubbles, I am guessing that those who watched "The Call to Unite" already value unity. If you are tired of being divided from one another, then I recommend that you watch some of the recordings from this 24-hours livestream. And, as followers of Jesus, I want to suggest to you today that we should all be working to be united with all others, and not just those who are already like us.

Some may think that this unity is only possible in the next life. But, Jesus tells us to be the his hands, and feet, and voice so that these Godly things can happen in this world.

I hope you can imagine a world in which we are united to God and to others. We must believe in a future that we can imagine. Scientists and doctors are working to combat the disease of COVID-19. As followers of Jesus we must work against the disease that we all feel. The fear of being around others. The uncertainty of what is going to happen in the future. The anxiety what hits so many of us. When we focus on the unity we have through God, then we work against the dis-ease that is going to last so much longer than the Coronavirus disease.

In a time that has so many shrill voices, may we be light. May we mirror beauty back to others so that they can see themselves in our smiling eyes. May we drown out the noise with songs of unity.

We have a God of unity. Embrace that unity with God and with others.