

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday Easter (C)

29<sup>th</sup> May 2022

'May they be one in Us'

Acts 7: Stephen sees Jesus in the glory of God

Ps 96: *For You indeed are the Lord most high above all the earth*

Apoc 22: *Come, Lord Jesus*

Jn 17: 20–26: *may they be so completely one ...*

We love doing things with others, don't we? Being united with others in some common purpose can bring a real buzz, a euphoria, a sense of elation at just being human and being with others. Dancing on a boat on the Thames, joining a political rally, singing on the football terraces, being with others at Mass, praying in huge crowds in St Peter's Square with the Pope, or at World Youth Day ... Man's a social being and likes doing things together, and the greater the crowd joining in the action the more euphoric it can feel. We have this urge to want to be united — it thrills us to be engaged in something together for a common purpose.

But all too often, the greatest incentive to uniting together is 'in opposition to ...' others: football crowds chanting one against another; political parties trading slogans; a country taking up arms against another nation,

or across a sectarian divide. These sort of things can, sadly, really get people united behind a cause — bashing the other side! How hard it is instead to get people to unite behind causes which are for the benefit of others, rather than for their battering. What a sorry state of affairs!

Here's Jesus praying to get the message across to the apostles at the Last Supper, not one but four times! *May they all be one ... May they be one in us ... May they be one as we are one ... May they be so completely one ...* What Jesus is talking about is not 'one ... in *opposition* to ...' another one, but *one*, truly one! Not one set against another set (of Christians against pagans, say), but completely one. Jesus is praying for mankind to be one in Him — His apostles, and His Church for a start, but ultimately for all people to be one in Him. We have this urge to be united as a human race, but can miss the focus of our unity: we can't be fully united e.g. as dog-walkers, or as nationalists, or as socialists, or as Brits ... there is only one name by which the whole of mankind can be united, and that is the name of Jesus. Mankind can only be

one in Jesus — in no-one else; in nothing else. Our urge to be united, and our emotional thrill from seeing and experiencing a large group of people at one has its source in our really being one people in God's sight, one race modelled on God made man, all made to be one in Jesus. There's one world (God's world), one race (the human race), one Lord, and one Spirit who can unite us, the Spirit of Jesus.

It is the *Holy Spirit* whom Jesus promised to send after His Ascension who brings about unity; the Spirit binds the Church together and drives us outward to draw all people into this same communion. The Church is the global village begun: mankind together for God already. God's will is that all people may be in His Church. That's not some arrogant statement about power or defeat of others, but it's about the truth that only in Jesus can mankind ever be united. Christianity is not some sort of a sect, all right for some if they like — it is the *only* way to be fully united to God, as He Himself planned: for He is the one and only God-made-man.

We're now in these special ten days between Our Lord's Ascension and His sending of the Spirit at Pentecost — they should be for us days of keen prayer. They were, as it were, the Church's first 'retreat,' as the apostles kept a 10-day prayer vigil with each other and with Our Lady closeted in that upper room in Jerusalem. They prayed fervently for the 'clothing with power from on high' which Jesus had solemnly promised. How well they knew that they would be riven by dissension and disputes — utter disunity — without the unifying grace of the Spirit. Indeed, without the Holy Spirit upon us and within us there is no Church, no unity in Jesus, no grace to be His good and holy people. The Spirit unites us as disciples of Christ, but also turns our hearts towards all other people too: the Spirit in our heart prompts us to compassion and sincere love for every person. It is always sinful to hate another human being, but the tender Spirit of God in our hearts dispels such sins, and makes us reach out to our brothers and sisters in Christ — just as much to the ones who do not yet acknowledge Christ as to those who do.

And so, amongst the other intentions uppermost in our hearts these Ascension–Pentecost ‘retreat days’ — and among them we include of course our ongoing prayers for those of you still diligently studying, mid-exams, whilst others of your contemporaries might have finished and are already beginning to disperse ... But, as I said, alongside such prayers which are most urgent (!), we also should be thinking about, and praying about, our unity of faith with others in Christ. I think that this early summer time is a good moment to be coming forward if you, or someone you know, wants to consider becoming a Catholic in the next year or so. I would dearly like to be able to chat to anyone who wants (or might want) to explore the Catholic faith in the coming months. For some of you, or for some of your friends, this could already be a thing already on your agenda — something pressing to consider, to explore and to seek God’s blessed guidance in. For others of you it might not yet have occurred to you ... but if you are a non-Catholic, baptized or unbaptized, now is surely a really good moment to pay it some real attention. And as a

Catholic community we should be praying for those of our acquaintance who have not yet sought full communion with us in the faith — and especially those already connected in some way with Newman House.

Jesus’s insists that our own unity, our ‘being together in faith’ — in worship, charity and fraternity — spills over automatically in convincing others. Are there many more poignant words in the Gospel than those uttered by Jesus at the Last Supper, as we heard: “*With Me in them, and you [Father] in Me, may they be so completely one that the world will realise that it was You who sent Me.*” It is our unity, our living the faith in a united, convincing, joyous way, that will provide the greatest conviction to others that Christ *is* the Way! — the one and only Way. So, let’s bear that in mind as we live out these latter days of Eastertide, and on into the summer.

Let’s be there, for our friends and acquaintances — let’s pray for them, chat to them, answer their questions, talk to them about faith, especially those whose hearts God’s Spirit is already moving to respond to His gentle

invitation to embrace the Gospel. It's a crucial part of our Chaplaincy life, to be a crucible of the faith, to allow for the encouragement and formation of new young Catholics. So, I reiterate: speak to them yourself, especially if you discern that the Lord is moving their hearts to come to know Him better; and invite them to come and chat to me — informally, with no pressure, no agenda. Better still, come with them to see me yourself, make it easier for them, walk with them on this journey, and help them to find Christ. We had a lovely Baptism here at the Easter Vigil — a very blessed moment in that student's life journey, and we would want that to be repeated across the lives of so many more in the coming year. But it's up to you, to reach out in the courage of the Spirit, in your baptismal mission, to bring others into this unity for which Christ prayed at the Last Supper:

*Father, I have made Your name known to them, and will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them.*

*I pray not only for these, but for those also who*

*through their words will believe in them ...*