

16th Sunday per Annum - B
Jeremiah 23:1-6;
Ephesians 2:13-18;
Mark 6:30-34
Little Flower - 7/21/24

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today marks the end of the 10th National Eucharistic Congress. People from all parts of the United States have traveled to Indianapolis to be part of it, uniting Catholics from all parts of the country in their faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The National Eucharistic Congress indeed should be unifying because the Eucharist is the Sacrament of Unity.

In today's first reading, Jeremiah proclaimed, "*Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the LORD.*" The shepherds whom Jeremiah was indicting in this passage were the kings of Israel who divided the people rather than uniting them. Not wanting to be completely negative, Jeremiah prophesied the coming of a king, "*a righteous shoot to David,*" who "*shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is right and just in the land.*" He, of course, was prophesying the coming of Christ.

Tragically there have been divisions in the Church from the beginning. The split between East and West and the Reformation were the two biggest. However, even today in our own country, there are significant divisions within the Catholic Church. What is happening in the Church today is the same thing that is happening within our society. We tend to watch and listen to TV, radio, and podcast programming that supports what we already believe, which in turn reinforces what we already believe.

As Catholics, we believe that the Pope and bishops have primary teaching authority in the Catholic Church. What concerns me is that some Catholics have replaced the Pope and bishops as the teaching authority with others whom they watch or listen to on TV, radio, or podcast programming. In my mind, this is a major cause of today's confusion and disunity in the Church.

Unity is also the theme of today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. According to St. Paul, Christ died on the cross to reconcile Jews and Gentiles and reconcile both with God in one body through the cross. Although I have pointed this out before, look at our beautiful crucifix. The vertical bar represents Jesus' reconciling us with God. The horizontal bar as well as Jesus' outstretched arms represents Jesus reconciling Jews and Gentiles. Since all non-Jews were Gentiles, Jesus reconciled all peoples. When Paul wrote about Jesus reconciling both with God in one body, when he wrote about Jesus creating in himself one new person in place of the two, he was writing about us becoming the Body of Christ. We are the living Body of Christ.

The Church itself is a sacrament of unity, and the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity. The Church is the sign and sacrament of our union with God and the sign and sacrament of our unity with one another. However, when we receive the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity, the Eucharist is not only a sign of our union with God and our unity with one another but also deepens that union and unity.

Living as an active practicing Catholic within the Church is not always easy. Many active, practicing Catholics feel guilty when they take time for themselves, when they are not working or praying. Jesus, however, told his disciples, "*Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.*" It is important that he talked about going away to a deserted place. In other words, we need alone time to really rest and recharge.

My brothers and sisters, when Jesus saw the crowd that followed him, "*his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things.*" With the conclusion of the National Eucharistic Congress, the third year of the National Eucharistic Revival begins. The theme of the third year is mission. We are called to share not only our faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but we are also called to be Christ to others and bring others to Christ. The Eucharist transforms us into the Body of Christ called to pour our lives in witness and service to others.