

7th Sunday of Easter

Today's readings are about people's bearing heroic witness to Jesus through life and death, and the Source of the inspiration behind such witness-bearing. They urge us to work for greater Christian unity and to consider the power of Christian witnessing.

The first reading describes the martyrdom of Stephen, showing us how he bore witness to the forgiving love of Jesus by his last prayer. In the second reading, taken from the Book of Revelation, Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, is pictured as having all the forces of Heaven and earth at his disposal, standing ready to help us in our Christian witness-bearing. It is relatively easy to acknowledge our oneness with Stephen and to long for the experience of eternal oneness with "all those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb". But to remain truly one with all of our brothers and sisters continues to be a daily challenge.

Today's Gospel is the last part of the "priestly prayer" of Jesus after the Last Supper. This chapter of John has been called "The Testament of Jesus" or "Jesus' High Priestly (or Intercessory) Prayer." During that long prayer, Jesus prayed first for himself for his own glorification as he faced the cross. Then, he prayed for his disciples that they might be unified and protected in the face of opposition from the world, and finally he prayed for those in distant lands and far-off ages, including ourselves, who would enter the Christian Faith through the witness-bearing of the Apostles and their successors. Thus, this is Jesus' prayer for each one of us. We have complete Faith and certainty because Jesus put his confidence in God and entrusted us to Him.

We need to pray for unity and serve one another in unity. We must pray for unity and discuss the similarities we share with others as well as our differences. Along with prayer, we must put our words into action. This means that we are to serve one another and to love one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord. What unites us is greater than what divides us.

As we move nearer to Jesus Christ, in him we move nearer to one another. Such unity is ultimately a gift of the Holy Spirit and of His guidance. The soul of the ecumenical

movement then, is spiritual. Only by a renewal of the spiritual, by common prayer and common listening to the Word of God, can we hope to overcome the present ecumenical impasses and difficulties. In the words of Pope St. John Paul II: “The door to ecumenism is opened only on our knees.”

We need to have a clear idea about the Catholic stand on ecumenism. In his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, Pope St. John Paul II warns against compromise for the sake of unity. He states, “the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement is to reestablish full visible unity among all the baptized.” He adds, “It is already possible to identify the areas in need of fuller study before a true consensus of Faith can be achieved.”

One day, a man was walking across a bridge and saw another man standing on the edge, about to jump off. He immediately ran to him and said, “Stop! Don’t do it!” “Well, why shouldn’t I?” he replied. The other said, “Well, there’s so much to live for!” “Like what?” “Well ... are you religious or atheist?” “Religious.” “Me, too! And are you Christian or Jewish?” “Christian.” “Me, too! Are you Catholic or Protestant?” “Protestant.” “Me, too! Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?” “Baptist.” “Wow! Me too! Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?” “Baptist Church of God.” “Me, too! Are you Original Baptist Church of God, or are you Reformed Baptist Church of God?” “Reformed Baptist Church of God.” “Me, too! Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1915?” “Reformed Baptist Church of God, reformation of 1915!” To which he said, “Die, you heretic!” and pushed him off the bridge.