

**Seventh Sunday of Easter**  
**May 12, 2013**  
**Homily for the Anglican Use Mass**  
**of**  
**St. Thomas More Catholic Parish**  
**celebrated at**  
**St. Joseph Catholic Church**  
**Scranton, PA**  
**John 14:23-29**

In 1972 the Governor of Pennsylvania recommended a change in our state's abortion laws. He proposed that any woman for any reason should be able to obtain an abortion for up to eighteen weeks into her pregnancy. In proposing this, he needed religious cover, so to speak, and he got it. Lloyd Gressel, the Episcopal Bishop of Bethlehem, encouraged Governor Shapp in his proposal; and when Gressel died thirty years later, his obituary mentioned this incident as one in which he took great pride. As you can imagine, the Catholic bishops of the state had a much different view. So did the Pennsylvania State legislature: they responded by passing legislation that banned all abortions except to save the life of the mother, which the governor vetoed.

I relate this story about the history of our state because it illustrates the damage that is done by a divided Christian witness. Though the majority of Christians in the state found the idea of legalized abortion abhorrent, the governor was able to find a Christian in a position of authority, however limited and objectively insignificant, who would say publicly that killing unborn children was in accord with the Gospel.

Jesus prayed to the Father in our Gospel today that His disciples “. . . may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” The fact that Christian disciples are divided, then, means that the world has a harder time believing that God sent His Son into the world out of His great love for His human creation. In other words, unity aids evangelization and disunity harms it. We will have an easier time making converts to Catholicism, for example, when there is no person bearing the name of Christ contradicting Holy Mother Church every time she takes a stand on a matter concerning faith and morals. Given the choice between two competing voices, the politicians, the media and even private citizens will trumpet the one with which they agree, as if it were what Jesus actually asserted. This dynamic, an enduring problem not unique to Pennsylvania in 1972, breeds confusion among the unbelieving and the disbelieving and is a mockery of God's will for the world.

The situation is even more tragic when we consider the purpose of evangelization, which Jesus reveals in today's Gospel, as well. He says, “I made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” Very clearly the purpose of evangelism is to share the love of God with those who have not known it, so to the degree that evangelism is hindered by disunity, we see that disunity inhibits the full blossoming of the love God has for us. Less unity, less evangelism, less love.

How many people do we know who are desperately in need of God's love? The abused, the rejected, the lonely, the exploited and so many others. It's not that our separated brothers say that abuse, rejection, loneliness and exploitation are okay or even good things; but in the absence of the fullness of the Truth, they take positions on moral issues that aid and abet the abuse of the rejected and the exploitation of the lonely. The divisions in the Body of Christ play a role in depriving too many souls of the healing balm of God's love, because the uninitiated haven't the means to discern truth from falsehood and true love from fake love.

Our ministry, then, takes on added importance because so many of us belonged to ecclesial communities that are not united to Holy Mother Church. In fact, I know that I personally fostered the confusion that today I deplore, because I was the pastor of an Episcopal Parish; and we regularly took into communion with us disaffected Catholics who question the Church's teaching on any number of subjects. The fact that today we have rejected the disunity that nurtures confusion means we can be powerful witnesses to the unity Jesus prayed for from the beginning.

I want to emphasize this point because I am often met with disbelief when I tell people I was once an Episcopal minister and am now a Catholic priest. One lady told me, "I thought you'd go the other direction. That I could understand. But why would anyone choose Catholicism?" I then had the opportunity to share with her my conversion story and refute in one short conversation the common perception that the Catholic Church is losing people in droves while other religious communities outpace them in growth. The reality is that in America the Catholic Church is growing, and our parish is a sign of that growth. More than that, our parish is a sign that the divisions in Christendom of the past five hundred years can be undone. We can come home to the Church, and the Church welcomes us.

It is in this context that I hope you understand the additional Mass we will begin to offer next week. It is a "last chance" Mass for those who have not yet fulfilled their Sunday obligation, but our intention is not to develop a congregation of Catholics who like to sleep in. Rather, we understand that our target is those for whom smells and bells are unfamiliar. That is, a High Mass that lasts 1¼ to 1½ hours each Sunday is our tradition, but it is not everyone's tradition.

In fact, when I was growing up I noticed that a lot of our Protestant brothers and sisters had two services each Sunday, one a shorter one and the other longer. One had a choir, a long sermon and more ceremony, and the other had less of all three. Rarely did those who went to the short one go to the long one, and vice versa. But they were all members of the same parish. This is the model I have in mind—not splitting our congregation, but developing a whole new one. But our Catholic outcome will be better, because the different styles of worship will not represent the different theologies that different services in the Protestant world often represent. We'll all believe the same thing, while honoring God in a little different way.

I hope, also, that this additional Mass will illustrate another truth: the disunity that sows confusion and inhibits the sharing of God's love has nothing to do with how we express our faith, but in the rejection of the Faith. An embrace of the Truth means one may honor our Lord in more ways than one, with the goal always being that we find the means to bring even more people into unity that the Gospel may more effectively be proclaimed.