

ONE

Romans 12:3-5 NLT

The theme for today's homily is clearly marked. As we get ready to come to the table, we remember the words of the hymn,

“We, though many...

We are *one*... in the Lord of all.” (*One Bread, One Body* UMH 620)

The apostle Paul wrote: *whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free...* [whether Republicans, Democrats, independents or none of the above; whether liberal or evangelical]; ...*you have been baptized by one Spirit to form one Body.*

Our oneness is in and through Christ. The unity of the Body of Christ, the Church, is of extreme importance. There are several reasons for our unity in Jesus Christ to be important. Here is one of the many reasons: **our oneness in Christ witnesses to a broken and very divided world that with God unity is possible even in the midst and in the presence of differences and diversity.**

Jesus prayed for us, his followers, to be one (John 17:21) just as God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one.

We know that our oneness is not perfect; however, it's being perfected as we willingly let ourselves be bound together with the love of God.

Coming to the table should remind us that we are ONE in Christ.

We know unity is *not* about everybody thinking the same way and doing the same things. Oneness is not sameness. Unity is about acknowledging that our distinctiveness and individual gifts cannot accomplish much without the uniqueness of those around us.

That's why Paul wrote, “*Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.*” **Romans 12:4-5 NLT**

A good illustration of how unique and individual gifts work together is sports. I love baseball. Your favorite sport team is one team; however, not everybody in that team plays the same position. Even though they are one team, individually they are not the same. When the players are in the field, they *harmonize* their unique talents from their different positions to accomplish a common goal. They do so for the love of baseball, their team, because they have the common goal of winning.

Tony Evans says, “God has a team. It's made up of Africans, Anglos, Hispanics, Asians, Middle Eastern, and a variety of other people and cultures. God never wants you to make your distinction, your history or your background, so precious to you that it messes up the team. Nor does God want you to ignore or diminish your distinction, your history or your background, thus leaving little with which to contribute to God's team.”¹

¹ Tony Evans, “Why Black History Matters” Accessed December 10, 2016, <http://tonyevans.org/mobile/tag/oneness/>

Unity is about acknowledging our unique gifts, needs, views, wants and desires without giving them ultimate priority. Unity is about harmonizing our uniqueness and differences to accomplish a common goal. We do this because we love and have God's interests and vision for the world, as our goal and common denominator.

I believe that apart from God there is no unity. That's why we should ask God to bind us together, to make us one. But, what are we really asking when we say, "Lord, make us *ONE*?"

Here is what I believe "Make Us *ONE*" means. When we pray, "Lord, make us *ONE*" we are actually saying:

Lord, help us be...

O b l i g i n g

N o t

E g o c e n t r i c

When we pray, "Lord, help us be obliging," we are saying, "Lord, help me be accommodating, willing, considerate, gracious, unselfish..." It is through these godly qualities, which find their origin in God's love and compassion, that God, intimately and inseparably, glues our uniqueness and differences together.

I do believe that Paul was asking the church in Rome to have this same attitude. When talking about the unity of Christ's Body, the apostle warned the church in Rome with the words: "*Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves...*" (Romans 12:3).

In other words, don't put yourself above anybody because this creates disharmony. Rather, "*Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves.*"

"*Be honest with yourself...*" doesn't mean "put yourself down." It means:

- Be aware of your own bias.
- Do not make of yourself (your opinions, preferences, experiences) the ultimate truth.
- Do not take for granted that you are absolutely right and that those around you are dead wrong, especially those with whom you disagree.
- Stop being defensive, prideful, excusing yourself, and blaming others. These things create discord.
- Search deep within the real reasons why you may feel a certain way, instead of making others seem like they are the ones who are or have a problem.
 - A couple of weeks ago, I felt my wife was being moody and overcritical. I felt like "every time" I said something my wife found fault in my statements. I was convinced that my statements were not inappropriate (at least I didn't want to see it that way). I was convinced that she was the one with the problem. The more I tried to defend my position, the more blind I grew to my insensitive, thoughtless, inaccurate, untimely comments, and the more I tried to pretend that the problem was on her side not mine. It took some serious and *honest* self-examination to

realize that she was not wrong, but that **I** was wrong for making such statements and for depicting her as the one who was the problem or had a problem.

That's exactly what the apostle Paul is saying when he is warning us to *be honest* when we evaluate ourselves.

“Measure yourselves by the faith God has given you.” The faith God has given you is not only for you to move mountains; it is not only for you to receive what you ask for in prayer; it is not only for you to hope for a better future. The faith God has given you is also for you to measure yourself, so that you can strive for unity and harmony, instead of creating dissention.

Lord, help us be...

***O** b l i g i n g*

***N** o t*

***E** g o c e n t r i c*

If we take it backwards, *Egocentric Not Obliging*, then there is unhealthy fighting, disputing, and attacking that results in rupture and division.

As we come to the table, we remember that we are one. We remember what our oneness is demanding from us. Today we remember our responsibility to bear with one another in love, to maintain unity by the bond of peace and to be the body of Christ in the world.

As we come to the table, we celebrate our unity in Christ. We recognize the small things that can divide us and remember that, with God, we can overcome all things. Here at the table, the worldly labels that create divisions and hierarchies disappear because we receive anew our identity in Christ.

Here at the table, we acknowledge that we belong to God and to each other, and with this in mind, we share the bread and the cup of Holy Communion.