

We bow our hearts in prayer: O Lord, as You are one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, we pray that You would continue to unify us with Yourself so that we may be one with You throughout eternity. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed (which certainly includes you, our candidates for confirmation),

On the night Jesus was betrayed, He told His disciples: **I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away...**

Why was it advantagous that Jesus ascend into heaven?

Three reasons can be briefly summarized as we consider the work of our Triune God.

The first reason we confessed just moments ago:

that *Jesus ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father.*

He ascended to exercise “**All authority in heaven and on earth** that was **given to [Him]**” ^{Matthew 28:18} for our good... for the good of the Church.

The 2nd reason we will hear in our text: that the Son might fill all things,

with both His human and divine nature; and not only with His omnipresences

but especially with His gracious presence, there to forgive, equip and strengthen His saints.

And the 3rd reason was what He previously told the Apostles on the night He was betrayed:

if I go, I will send Him [that is, the Holy Spirit] **to you.**

Jesus gave us insight into God’s ultimate purpose for His coming to earth, suffering, dying, being buried, rising to life again and ascending into heaven when He prayed to His Father:

The glory that You have given Me I have given to them,

that they may be one even as We are one,

I in them and You in Me, that they may become perfectly one... ^{John 17:22-23}

In today’s text for meditation, we read this very thing. ... *We read as follows in Jesus’ name:*

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says,

“When He ascended on high He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.”

(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower regions of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen ^(John 17:17)

What word did you hear most prominently in the reading? It was the word “one.”

St. Paul tells us of “**one Spirit... one Lord... one God and Father of all...**”

In just a few weeks we will again focus our attention on the doctrine of the triune nature of God, but suffice it for today that we recognize that they are 3 distinct persons who are perfectly one, perfectly united, not only in His nature but also in His desires, purposes, and work.

But we should not think that God is only interested in unity within Himself.

God also desires unity with His creation, the chief of which is mankind.

This was originally how it was: when He created the world, He made man in His own image.

We were perfect in our obedience and in our knowledge of Him.

We were united with Him, not by having the same nature, but by sharing in His righteousness.

We were one with Him.

But as you know, sin came into the world. It separated us from God.

We no longer had His image, His inherent righteousness. We were different from Him.

Ever since the fall, many divisions have been blamed on differences.

Cain was different from Abel in that God was pleased with Abel and so Cain killed him.

When men united in rebelling against God's command to spread out over the earth,

He divided them by giving them different languages at the Tower of Babel.

And today, if you watch, listen to, or read any bit of news, a constant theme you hear is

the great and sharp division between the different political parties or different ideologies.

How quickly we are prone to separate ourselves from people of different ethnicities,

different languages, different education levels, different income levels, different social statuses, even different ages, and different sexes.

In the same vein, we are prone to unite with others with whom we have similarities,

the same blood line, the same speech, the same tastes in politics, music, food, etc.

But is it correct to say that "difference" is the true cause of divisions among us?

In our text, St. Paul goes through that list of ones – one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father.

In this list of ones, we see, as stated before, the oneness of God, but we also see that oneness, that unity, extended to the Church.

The Church is the **one body** of Christ, united in the **one baptism** by the **one faith**.

But we also see differences in this one body. St. Paul continues:

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

St. Paul explains how he is using the word "grace" here when he quotes the Psalm, **"and He gave gifts to men."**

So we see him using "grace" here to speak of the different gifts that He gives to individuals in the Church according to the measure that He desires to gift them.

So to some He gives the grace of teaching. To others He gives the grace of generosity.

To each according to His measure.

Still others, and some of the same, have the grace of service, the grace of patience, the grace of love, the grace of wisdom, the grace of gentleness, the grace of administration.

But it does not matter what gifts He disperses and to whom and in what measure, these gifts are for the building up of the **"one "body" of Christ,"** the Church.

But how often are these differences seen as divisive, even in the Church.

Perhaps you have thought of some of the graces you have been gifted with

as more important than others, and so look down on those who don't have your gift, or not to the measure that the Lord has given it to you.

Or maybe you are one who tends to think little of the graces you have been given,

especially as you compare yours to those of others.

You are envious of their gifts which may seem more important, but then think little of your own.
Can children, even confirmands, think this way?

That because they/you are not grownups, their/your graces, their/your gifts aren't as important?

Because they/you can't give \$100s of dollars in offering, their/your \$10 aren't significant?

Or because they/you are not teaching, that their/your grace of learning is less important?

It is even more of a shame for us when such thoughts lead us to behave accordingly.

So that if I consider my job less important or less valuable, I put forth less effort.

But then I would be depriving the body of Christ of the service, prayers, help and support
that God would give it through me.

Or if I think my job is the only important one, then I would minimize God's service through others.

What St. Paul gets at though, is that all these differences in graces/gifts is good for the Church,
the members performing different and various tasks for the good of all and the glory of God.

So it is not the differences that divide the Church,

but it is our sin which seeks either to puff us up or tear us down.

And this sin would then divide us from God who gives different gifts in different measures.

And so the Son of God, as is His nature, came to unite man and God once again.

He did it in His flesh by taking our human nature into His divine nature to be united forever.

He did it by **being born under the law to redeem those who were under the law,**

so that we might receive adoption as sons, Galatians 4:4-5

united in God's family, not by nature, but by sharing in Jesus' righteousness.

Here He came in great lowliness, not making full use of all His divine powers,

being subject to our human weakness and to suffering,

yet even then, He did not sin. We never hear Jesus criticizing or belittling the gifts of others.

He was never frustrated with His own gifts, never envious of the gifts of others.

And when others used God's gifts against God's will, He sought to correct them,

so that they might repent and, by the Holy Spirit, be restored to unity with God.

But because we fail to use our gifts to God's glory alone and in service always to our neighbors;

because you unlovingly mock the gifts of others or even mock your own and neglect them;

because you emphasize your gifts or emphasize the grace given to others;

Jesus took His greatest gift, His perfect human nature, created in the image of God,

and sacrificed it upon the cross, spilling His perfect precious blood for you and for me.

But death could not hold Him. He rose to life and still gives you this greatest of gifts

by uniting Himself to you in Baptism so that His righteousness, His perfection, is yours,

making you acceptable before the Father's throne.

After His ascension, Jesus has not ceased from His purpose of uniting man and God.

He continues His work by sending out the Holy Spirit through His Means of Grace,

His Word and His Sacraments.

Through these gifts, He restores and strengthens the image of God in each one of you.

This unity is given and expressed beautifully in the mystery of the Lord's Supper.

(That some of us will be receiving for the first time today,

and other for the first time later this month.)

Here He comes to you and says “take of Me, my Body and Blood, so that I may be one with you, and if we are one, then you are also one with My Father in heaven.

You and all the others that join you, receiving Me for their forgiveness,

Receiving Me for their strength so that they may use their God-given graces for the good of all.

While there are still differences of ethnicity, language, opinion, and gifts,

Jesus unites us together into His one body throughout the world and throughout time, and perfectly gives gifts according to His measure, perfectly knowing what His body, the Church, needs and when it needs it and how much of it it needs.

He uses these differences, not to divide, but to unify and strengthen the Church

through the many and various complimentary gifts, thus fitting us together into His one body to be co-heirs with Him in His kingdom of glory forever and ever.

He is risen!

C: He is risen indeed!

Alleluia!

Soli Deo Gloria