3 A R

MDP of God

There’s a story about a Baptist pastor---he used to start the service, but before his sermon he would pause for a long time in the sanctuary area

One day his ten yearo old son asked him about it. He said, “Dad, why do you always wait for so long with a bowed head before you preach your sermon?”

And the minister said, “Well son, I’m praying to God—I’m praying that He’ll give me a good sermon to preach. I’m praying that He’ll give me a sermon that will inspire the people”

And the son said, “Dad, if you ask God for that---why doesn’t He ever give you that?”

My friends, we count on the people around us to support us—to build us up –to encourage us---but sometimes they don’t---But we don’t stop loving them –we don’t give up on them—we continue to love them

And that’s the message comes through loud and clear in our readings today

In our gospel, we see Jesus at the very beginning of His ministry – *and what does He do?* – *He forms a* ***community*** *around Himself*

Now remember, he’s God – He’s all powerful – **He doesn’t need any help** – *but the very first thing He does* is **to gather a community around Himself**

He does that to model **what He wants** for us – He wants His followers to be a community of love – He wants us to be **united** as a community of faith

I’ve mentioned many times in homilies – to know what Jesus came to do, we have to know what the problem was – the problem is sin

And the book of Genesis tells us what sin did to us – *it divides us*

When God confronts Adam and Eve with their sin, what does Adam say? **- “the woman”** – “the woman you put here God” – it’s her fault, it’s Your fault it’s everyone’s fault but mine

That’s showing how sin seperates us – that same message is reaffirmed at the story of the Tower of Babel- we’re told the whole world speaks one language – but all of a sudden because of sin, they can’t talk to each other- they’re divided into peoples and cultures who can’t understand each other and who don’t like each other

Sin seperates us, not only from God, *but from each other as well*

**Jesus came to unite us** – to unite us to God, ***and just as importantly*** – to unite us into a community – into the family of God—In our gospel today it said Jesus preached the “good news” **of the kingdom**—*that is the Church*—that’s what the good news was about

God wants us to be a community for several reasons

First of all, because we’re made in His image and likeness – God is one, but He’s a community (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)

He wants us to be a community, because God Himself is a community of love

2ndly, He wants us to be members of community – *because we need it*

Most of you, know far better then I do – that it’s not easy in our world today to live the Christian life

Chances are, many of you in your places of work, are not surrounded by people who do not take the commandments of God seriously

If you’re in high school or college or the work place – chances are that there are a number of people who don’t take the command of purity – of moderation in drinking – to tell the truth (to be honest in your dealings with others) –keep’s God’s name and God’s day holy- to not steal (like from your boss or from customers) –about the sacredness of life from the moment of conception to the time of natural death-/// ***chances are you are often with people who don’t take those commandments seriously***

And they might even mock you for taking God’s way seriously

To follow the straight and narrow way – **isn’t easy** – *you can feel all alone* – you can feel, “Well, everyone else is doing it why not?”

*That’s why we need a community* – that’s why we need each other -

Look around – you’re surrounded by people who like you are trying to walk that narrow way Jesus talks about- people like you who struggle with sin - who aren’t perfect – who have their weaknesses-/ // but people who are striving to be faithful to Lord’s call to holiness.

Knowing that -can and should strengthen us to carry on the good fight – to seek to stand up against the false values of the world and live with the virtues of faith.

Knowing we’re not alone – knowing others are striving to live as the Lord calls, can strengthen us so that we truly live the faith

We need each other- we need community to be faithful

My friends, there are two extremes in our world today that we really need to avoid **if we are to be faithful** to God’s call to us

The first extreme – is what I would call, individualistic Christianity

“Me and Jesus – I don’t need anybody else – I don’t need the Church- I don’t need to go to church – I don’t need to be involved in the household of faith – I can pray **on my own** – I’ll relate to God **my** way” [It’s really better to relate God’s way]

That attitude is very American, but it’s not very Christian- *in fact it’s not Christian at all*

The bible says, “How can you love God who you can’t see, when you don’t love your brother who you can see.”

The bible says that we are part of the body of Christ and that we need each other – and that we need to use our gifts and talents to build one another up

I’ve often heard people say—and I’m sure you have to--- “those people are nothing but a bunch of hypocrites—I want nothing to do with them”---*does that sound like love to you?*

An essential part of choosing Christ – and essential part of the holiness that God wants all of us to have – is being a part of and building up the Christian community—*even when we see one another’s failings and weaknesses.* [you’ll see that in about a half hour in the parking lot…… He still wants us to love each other]

The second extreme we need to avoid – is again something that is all too common in our world today – and that’s the tendency to divide the body of Christ

When you look through the bible you’ll never see Jesus say, “Pick a church any church” or “Pick a belief any belief. God’s Word tells us that God wants all of His children to be united- in ***one*** household of faith

St. Paul says in our 2nd reading today, “I urge you in the name of our Lord Jesus that there be **no divisions** among you, *but that you be* ***united*** in the same mind and the same purpose.”

The fact is my friends, today there are 40,000 different Christian denominations, none of whom have the same beliefs – **those divisions are not of God**

God’s Word makes clear that He wants us to be united – He wants us to be one

If you read John 17 – that’s the prayer Jesus prayed at the Last Supper –

He prays that His followers will be **so united** – ***so one*** – that the world will believe in Him through the unity of the Church

*Have you noticed that a lot of people today don’tbelieve in Jesus? Could it be because of the disunity among Christians?*

Jesus only founded one Church (One, holy. Catholic, and apostolic Church)

He founded that Church on the Rock of Peter the first pope

[The name Peter, means Rock]- and He promised that the gates of Hell would never prevail against His Church – He promised He’d be with His Church to the end of the world

He said to Peter, “what you hold bound I will bound in heaven” – giving Peter and his successors the ability to enact laws that will foster the unity of the Church – laws which Jesus says, **He will hold bound in heaven**

Jesus wants us to be one, but sadly many people today have a consumer mentality toward the Church – “Which church makes me feel comfortable? – which church believes (of the many contradictory beliefs that are out there) – which belief makes me feel the best? Which church has the shortest sermons? Which church will be the least demanding? Which church makes me feel the best?

There are many people who ***out sinful pride decide*** – “I don’t like those beliefs – those people don’t understand the bible like I do – I’ll start my own church where the bible will really be taught”

Which of course means, “my personal interpretation of the bible”

*That’s not what God wants* – he wants us to be united- in the One Church He founded on the Rock of Peter, the first pope

[Don’t get me wrong – I’m not saying only Catholics can get to heaven- there are many people outside the visible bounds of the Catholic Church who are striving to serve God in the best way they know how – they don’t fully understand His plan – but they’re trying to do God’s Will as they know it]

[That being the case, doesn’t change the fact that God wants us to be one {He’ll make allowances for our weaknesses and for our misunderstands of His plan}– But the fact is God wants all people to be united in His One Church that Jesus founded on the Rock of Peter]

One of the reasons there is so much division today is because people don’t want to obey

There is a predominant attitude – an attitude that comes from sinful pride that says, “No one’s going to tell me what to do- how to live – what to believe -/ I’ll believe and do and live like I choose”

That’s not an attitude of humility – that’s not the attitude of “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”

My friends, we as Catholics have such a tremendous blessing – to be a part of the One Church He founded on the Rock of Peter.

We don’t have to reinvent the wheel of belief for ourselves – the faith has been handed on to us through His Church under the sure guidance of the Holy Spirit

What we believe here in Newbury or Burton or Munson Russell or Auburn or wherever – is the same that Catholics believe in India – in Russia – In Israel – In Rome – In China- in Croatia- In Africa- --*it’s the same belief throughout the world*

Beliefs that come from Jesus - through the apostles through an unbroken line of succession from Peter and the apostles in the first century – to Pope Francis and the bishops of the world today – **the same beliefs** [ there’s been clarification – a deeper understanding with the passing of time – but the same beliefs.]

That’s God’s plan – to keep us as one – **to keep us united in faith-united in truth**

My friends God’s Word tells us we need community – God wants us to be community – /// and that He wants that community to be united in belief – in practice –/// and certainly to be united in love of one another.

One last point I’d like to make—just as Jesus wants His followers to be one—it’s important that we realise if we are to be strong as a country—that we seek unity

We unfortunately live in a very divided nation---as a people we certainly are free to disagree in the area of politics—we’re certainly free to work to take our country in the direction that we think best

However, it is important that when we disagree with others that we strive to do that with charity--- disagreement doesn’t mean there has to be animosity—or vitriol –or hatred

People can disagree and still treat each other with respect---and still be kind--- and still try to work together for the common good

At this time when we’ve inaugurated a new president—let’s pray for our country—let’s pray that we can all work together for the common good—let’s pray that we might be one nation under God indivisible with liberty and justice for all