


## THAT THEY MAY BE ONE

Acts 1. 6-14

1 Peter 4. 12-14, 5. 6-11

John 17. 1-11

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

Isaac Asimov once told a hilarious story about a Jewish rabbi who was having trouble with his congregation; they couldn't agree on anything. The president of the congregation said, 'Rabbi, this can't continue. There has to be a conference, and we have to settle all areas of dispute once and for all.' The rabbi agreed.

At the appointed time the rabbi, the president and ten elders met around a magnificent mahogany table in the conference room of the synagogue. One by one the issues were dealt with; and on each issue, it became more and more apparent that the rabbi was a lonely voice in the wilderness. The president of the synagogue said, 'Come, Rabbi, enough of this. Let's vote and allow the majority to rule.' He passed out slips of paper and each man made his mark. The votes were collected and the president said, 'You may examine them, Rabbi. It is eleven to one against you. We have the majority.'

Offended, the rabbi rose to his feet and said, 'So, now you think because of the vote that you're right and I'm wrong. Well, that's not so. I stand here' (and he raised his arms impressively while looking heavenward) 'and call upon the Holy One of Israel to give us a sign that I'm right and you're wrong.'

No sooner were the words out of his mouth when there was a deafening clap of thunder and a brilliant flash of lightning that struck the mahogany table and cracked it in two. The room was filled with smoke and fumes, and the president and the

elders were hurled to the floor. Surrounded by rubble, the rabbi stood erect and untouched, his eyes and smile flashing with triumph. Slowly, the president lifted himself out of the rubble. His hair was singed, his glasses were hanging from one ear and his clothing was in disarray. Finally he said, 'All right, eleven to two. But we still have the majority.'

Unfortunately, we all know that not everything that is done in the Church or in the name of the Church is always done for the glory of God. We know that at times in its history, the Church (or at least some of its members) has ignored the will of God in order to have its own way. And as a consequence, there has been discord and disunity.

This discord and disunity stand in stark contrast to the prayer that our Lord offers for his disciples in chapter 17 of St John's gospel. Jesus's prayer is a prayer for unity. It is Christ's prayer for his companions and for his Church. Our Lord prayed that his disciples 'may be one, as we (he and the Father) are one' (17. 11).

How do we accomplish that? How do we bring about and work towards unity?

Firstly, unity has to start with us. We cannot wait for others to start. We have to be proactive and take the first steps. We have to stop doing and saying those things that lead to, cause and perpetuate disunity. Ultimately, our ability to work towards unity is linked to our personal relationship with Jesus. If we are ready to seek oneness with him and to have our lives knit together with his through faith, this will lead us to be knit together in love with others and with our Church.

Secondly, if there is to be unity in the Church, we have to pull together. I wonder if you have ever attended one of those country fairs where a competition is organised between horses? In this event, various weights are put on a sled, hitched to a horse

and pulled along the ground. When I watched this competition for the first time, the winning horse pulled a sled with 4,500 pounds on it. The runner-up was close, with a 4,400-pound pull. It was then decided to see what the performance of the horses would be when they were put together. Separately, the horses had pulled nearly 9,000 pounds; but when hitched together and working as a team, the winning horses were able to pull more than 12,000 pounds, almost three times what either one of them could pull, alone.

Imagine the powerful force we could exert as a parish and as the Church in the world, if we all ‘pulled together as a team’. We cannot accomplish much if we are going in many different directions. When we have a common purpose, a common vision and a common goal, then we can achieve great things, especially if our goal or vision is God-given and God-driven.

We have seen that this idea of unity starts with us, and that we have to pull together. But thirdly, we have to persevere. The secret is not giving up.

Unity isn’t easy! Most of us, if we are honest, have never learned how to disagree in love, or how to love those with whom we disagree. Christian unity is not determined by whether we agree with each other about every single issue, tradition or doctrine. Christian unity is determined by whether we love one another, and whether we reflect the love of God in Christ for the world.

There will always be that which separates Christians from Christians. But we can still affirm and celebrate God’s love for us all and our love for one another. In love, mutual respect, understanding and acceptance, we can be ‘one’ in Christ. We may never fully accomplish Christian unity, but by working toward it, at least we’ll be going in the right direction.

We are called to demonstrate our unity in Christ through love. It has to start with us; we have to pull together; and we have to keep on. No matter what the vote, our Lord's prayer (and his command) is still that we be one, just as he is one with God; and that we love one another, just as he has loved us.

Amen.