

Ordinary Time 12C 2016

One in Christ

For the past several weeks, the second reading of the Liturgy has been taken from St. Paul's letter to the Galatians. This is not a very long letter; you can read it in about twenty minutes. But it has had an enormous impact on our Christian faith since it deals with how we are saved. In this letter, St. Paul teaches us that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ rather than by what we do.

In the sixteenth century Protestants and Catholics were deeply divided over the meaning of this letter. Protestants accused Catholics of trying to earn their salvation by doing good works; and Catholics accused Protestants of saying there was no need to do good works as long as we believe in Christ. Catholics and Protestants have come a long way, and we no longer disagree about the essential meaning of this letter. We agree that we are saved by God's grace and that we must do good deeds, but these good deeds are the result God's grace at work in our us. For, we are saved by grace.

The short reading we just heard in the end of a long and complicated argument. The Galatians believed in Christ, but they were not sure their faith in Christ was enough. And so, although they believed in Christ, they were tempted to do something more, as if what God had done for them in Christ were not enough. It is at this point that St. Paul teaches them that there is no need to add to what God has done for them. What they must do, what *we* must do, is to put our trust and faith in Christ *and live accordingly*. Live by trusting faith, Paul says to us, and we will be saved. Live by trusting faith, and we will do

what God requires. Live by trusting faith in what God has done in Christ, and all will be well.

At the end of this argument St. Paul comes to his main point. He reminds us that we are sons and daughters of God because we have been baptized into Christ. And because we have been baptized into Christ, we have clothed ourselves in Christ. That is, we now belong to Christ; we have become a new person in Christ. Christ has broken down those barriers that separated us from each other. *Ethnic and racial barriers* no longer separate us if we are in Christ. *Social and class distinctions* no longer separate us if we are in Christ. *Sexual differences and orientation* no longer separate us if we are in Christ. For, if we are in Christ, we are one in Christ, and those divisions have been broken down.

Today, we live in a world where *national and racial divisions* still separate us from each other. We live in a world where *social and class distinctions* still separate us from each other. We live in a world where *sexual differences and orientation* still separate us from each. But this is not how it is in the community of the baptized, in the community of the church. Since we have been baptized into Christ, we are a new creation in Christ and all of these divisions count as nothing. This is what the church is and is meant to be. This is what our parish is and is meant to be—a place where we already see something of the kingdom of God, a place where we are one in Christ, a place where we are no longer divided by such external divisions.

How are we doing at St. Mary's? Have we gotten there yet? Do we want to get there? What must we do?