

REFLECTION FOR THURSDAY 7th WEEK OF EASTER

Acts 22:30; 23:6-1 John 17:20-26.

Today's Gospel passage is the concluding part of Jesus' "*High Priestly Prayer*" in his Last Supper discourse. Here, Jesus prays for true unity among his followers who accept him as their Lord and Saviour.

Divisions in Christianity: The first major division in Christianity, which took place in the fifth century, was the schism caused when the Eastern Orthodox Churches, under the patriarchs, separated themselves from the Western Church, under the Pope.

Next, the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century separated its followers from unity with the Church centred in Rome and freed them from her Authority. This separation resulted in the formation of more than 30,000 Protestant denominations during the following five centuries. According to Pope St. Paul VI [canonized October 14, 2018 by Pope Francis] "The Church founded by Jesus Christ and for which he prayed is indefectibly one in Faith, in worship and in the bond of hierarchical communion" (*Creed of the People of God*, 21).

Jesus' prayer for unity: In his prayer for unity among his disciples, Jesus mentions that the basis and criterion of unity must be the Unity of God in His Three Divine Persons among Whom there is eternal, mutual love and Self-giving. The unity of Jesus and his Father is a unity of love and obedience and a unity of personal relationship. Another reason for Christian Unity is the union of the faithful with Jesus Christ in His Mystical Body by Baptism, and through Him with the Father (verse 23). This means that the fullness of Unity is attained through the supernatural grace, which comes to us from the Father through Christ (cf. Jn 15:5). Jesus mentions that unity among the believers is essential if the world is to acknowledge Him as Lord and Saviour, because the disunity among Christians acts as the biggest block for evangelization, as it offers living, constant counter-witness to the Good News of Redemption.

Since Jesus Christ himself left us his final wish for unity through his prayer to the Father: "*that they may all be one; even as You, Father are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me*" (Jn 17:21), it is our duty to pray and work for meaningful unity among Christians.

Let us learn to appreciate each other's common beliefs and enter into genuine dialogue and cooperation with members of other Christian denominations, instead of accusing each other of heresy. We need to remember that the present non-Catholic Christians are not responsible for the historical events and actions from which the various denominations originated in the past.

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