

Christian Unity

A Sermon By Bp. Melchizedek

Delivered on January 20, 2019 – Christian Unity Service in Lincoln, Nebraska

My dearest fellow Christians, brothers and sisters in Christ!

Today, we come together in order to demonstrate unity despite theological, doctrinal and cultural differences.

We come together to pray for patience and mutual understanding, for brotherly and sisterly care of all who declare Jesus Christ as Lord. We pray for faithful witness to those who seek Him and cannot yet name Him, and we pray for reconciliation of those who reject Christ or continue to persecute Christians around the world.

Because our approach is a positive, uplifting attitude towards God and neighbor, we place the strongest emphasis on the development of the human conscious through refinement of genuinely Christian values. Thus, one's behavior toward other beings, whether towards fellow men or towards creation as a whole, is the outer indicator of one's inner spiritual development.

Let us seek wisdom and courage to be honest and not to make any demands of one another, but to allow the Holy Spirit a place of teaching and conviction among us, as the Heavenly Father draws *all* to the truth – which is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ by the same Holy Spirit.

Let us commit ourselves to search for a unity that is Christ-like, a unity that will be reflected in cordial relations and in emphasizing commonalities among us rather than differences.

Thus, I pray that we may commit ourselves to progress in finding the common witness of the Holy Gospel as delivered throughout the ages; that we seek wisdom and understanding in order to recognize Christ's presence as well as the Holy Spirit's work inside and outside any of our respective denominational boundaries.

Let us commit ourselves to the personal work of seeking the truth by the synergistic and creative life in the Holy Spirit, so that we may become peacemakers and find ways of understanding and ever new avenues of unity. I pray that we all embrace that unity, which has its foundation on *spiritual* truth, and reject any false unity based on religious delusions or ecclesial elitism. May we hold to Christianity not *churchianity*.

I pray that all Christians - of whatever branch or tradition - commit to overcoming the pride of human rationalism, the sin and rebellion against God that has created the walls of separation and somewhat broken the *Body of Christ*. Let us seek awareness as well as guidance of the Holy Spirit towards removing the walls that separate us.

Allow me to propose a three-step spiritual journey that will lead us to unity in Christ:

- First, we can do all things with confidence in the Holy Spirit, who comes to help our weakness (as St. Paul highlights in his letter to the Romans, Chapter 8, Verse 26).
- Secondly, we can trust in God's love and his promise of faithfulness to each one of us (again from the letter to the Romans Chapter 8, Verse 39).
- Thirdly, we can call to mind what St. Augustine (354-430 AD) over 1500 years ago had expressed so fittingly:

Unity in essentials

Diversity in non-essentials

Above all charity

Bishop Desmond Tutu expresses:

For Christians, who believe they are created in the image of God, it is the Godhead, diversity in unity and the three-in-oneness of God,

which we and all creation reflect.

Pope Francis points out:

The patient and enduring commitment to full unity, the growth of joint initiatives and cooperation between all of the Lord's disciples in service to the common good: all these are like a radiant light in a dark night and a summons to experience even our differences in an attitude of charity and mutual understanding. (Address at the cathedral at

Etchmiadzin, June 24, 2016)

John Wesley says:

Although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, need it prevent our union in affection? Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? Can we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt we can. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these small differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and good works

Martin Luther concludes:

To gather with God's people in united adoration of the Father is as necessary to the Christian life as prayer.

Tamara Grdzeldze, the Georgian ambassador and former staff member of the World Council of Churches, at a conference of Orthodox church leaders pointed out that *throughout history, unity always has been a work in progress.* She went on to say:
It is one thing to say that we are spiritually together and we are one, but if we don't practice it to make decisions, then it is very difficult to prove it to the world.

While we may take the advice of these holy leaders to heart, let us fervently pray that we be consumed by the love of Christ. We can always recognize the love of God in and among us, and stand firm in our opposition against any form of fanaticism and bigotry.

In the challenges of life, we are reminded that our struggle is spiritual. It is not flesh and blood that we wrestle against, but principalities and powers, rulers of the darkness in this world (as expressed in the letter to the Ephesians in Ch. 6, V. 12).

May we all be gentle, yet strong ministers and followers of Christ, as we keep in mind that the *essence of the beautiful is unity in variety.*

Finally, we can pray with Jesus (as recorded in the Gospel of St. John 17:20-23):

I pray (also) for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one — I in them and you in me — so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Amen.