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THE LINE

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OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS



Unity in Diversity and Diversity in the Unity

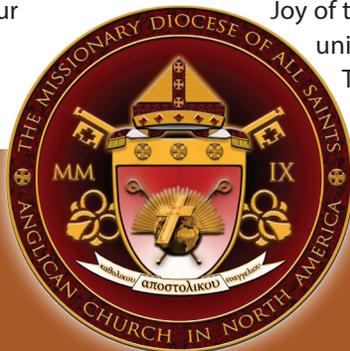
By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

In his opening address for our 2021 General Synod that was held via Zoom, Bishop Lipka said that, in pondering this upcoming Synod, he prayed, "How can we move forward in our relationship with God and with one another?" The answer that he received encompassed four ideas. The Bishop feels these four ideas should frame what we do this year in MDAS. These four ideas are Unity, Joy, Protection, and Sanctification.

Unity is the theme for this year. "Father, make us one in 2021 so that the world will know that You sent Your Son." Bishop Lipka sees this Unity in our worship, in our mission and in our ministry through love. Only through *agape* love can we truly become

one. *Agape* love is a sacrificial love, a supernatural love that is demonstrated in how Jesus loves the Church. We develop this same love through our love of God and our love of our neighbor. This *agape* love is what brings us into Unity. And this great love of both God and neighbor, in turn, compels us to proclaim the Gospel to an unbelieving world. This *agape* love, in other words, is the basis for our call to fulfill the Great Commission.

When Bishop Lipka spoke of Joy, he was referring to the Joy of the Lord. The Blessed Trinity exists in a true unity of Being through a mutual love between the Three Persons in the Blessed Godhead. This unity produces a great Joy. We experience this Joy



Our Core Value is:

"The Convocation of the West is Missionary, bringing people to Christ and meaningfully engaging in the transformation of the culture around us."

The Vision of the Convocation is:

"To STRENGTHEN existing churches;
To PLANT new churches; and
To RAISE UP missional leaders."

when we come to believe in Christ, and we experience it again and again through our shared worship, through our shared lives, and most importantly, through our shared sacraments, especially through Holy Eucharist. In turn, we are called to share this same joy that unites the Godhead and which brings true unity.

Although Unity and Joy are instantly recognizable, Protection may not be as apparent. When Bishop Lipka spoke of Protection, he meant protection from the father of lies. He told us that *diabolo*s means, “the scatterer or divider” and that *Satas* means “the accuser.” The devil wants to destroy the Church, and he wants to do so through disunity. He revels when we are scattered or divided, and he achieves much through accusations, and, of course, half-truths. Bishop Lipka told us that we need the Protection of the Holy Spirit against the enemy who wants to divide us. Therefore, we must all pray for His protection, especially in the coming year.

And finally Bishop Lipka called for Sanctification. He reminded us of how Jesus prayed that the Lord would sanctify us in the Truth. He said that we must remember that the Truth is not a creedal statement but a living person, namely Jesus the Christ. So, what leads us to the road to holiness and Sanctification?

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” [Acts 2:42]

This passage is our model. The Disciples and the Church devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching, to breaking of the bread and to prayer.

Bishop Lipka also mentioned the ACNA concept of “sustainability” and said that prayer is essential to our sustainability. He reminded us also that we are sanctified by the Word of God and that, only through God’s will, will the Church grow and prosper. With these four, Unity, Joy, Protection and Sanctification, our Diocese will be protected and will be able to more effectively help fulfill the Great Commission.

This address, in conjunction with Pentecost, made me stop and think. When Adam and Eve sinned, mankind fell, and so did all of creation with them. The initial history of mankind was appalling as we fell farther and farther away from God. It culminated in the Great Flood. Those who were saved grew and flourished, but they were not much better than their forefathers. And in time, their hubris and pride caused them to build the Tower of Babel.

In punishment, the Bible says that God caused them to speak different languages and scatter:

“Come let Us go down there and confuse their language, so they

may not understand one another’s speech’. So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city and the tower.” [Genesis 11:7-8]

Jesus is our Second Adam. From Him and through Him Mankind is saved and creation healed. And that process of healing is ongoing. Pentecost was one such healing. Whereas man’s sin of pride caused confusion, different languages, division and separation, God, through the Holy Spirit, brought understanding and unity. In other words, Pentecost was God’s answer to the Tower of Babel:

“Then they were all amazed and marveled saying to one another, ‘Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?’” [Acts 2:7-8]

Whereas the Tower of Babel confused languages and split mankind into separate tribes, Pentecost and the Holy Spirit united the different tribes and people with a common understanding. Each heard what the Apostles said in their own language, but it is not clear that the Galileans were actually speaking the different languages.

Through the Holy Spirit, there was a Unity of understanding even if there was a difference in language. And this thought struck me: Unity in diversity and diversity in the unity.

This phrase is the very concept of the Blessed Trinity. There are three distinct Persons in the Godhead and yet there is only One God. Each Person is distinct: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But in Their diversity, there is Unity: One God.

If God is love as St. John wrote, then there must be a Trinity. For love cannot exist without someone to love and someone or something to be loved. God the Father loves God the Son and visa versa, and the essence of their Love is the Holy Spirit. In

the Godhead, there is love, and through this divine Love, there is perfect Unity. Therefore, here is our answer to the riddle, how can we have unity in diversity and diversity in the unity? The answer is Love.

As many of you know, I grew up Roman Catholic. Originally, when I was just a little guy, the Mass was in Latin. At that time, there seemed to be a controlling belief that unity could only be maintained where every church, every clergyman, and every layperson was in perfect lockstep. Much of that changed after Vatican II, but much also remained. And what I learned during that time often haunts me.

When I became Anglican, I was saddened by the multitude of



provinces within what we called the Continuum. It seemed that the first reaction to difference of opinion was to split. Schism after schism happened, until there were some provinces that had only one church with one bishop. They professed that they were the only “true” Church, and the others were heretical. It was enough to make me think that maybe the best choice was either returning to Rome or going over to the Orthodox faith.

But then a great hope emerged. It was called the Anglican Church in North America, and it was going to be the repository of Anglican Orthodoxy. All Anglican churches would be welcomed to join, but there was a hitch: Dual Integrity. This is the belief that those churches that believe women should be ordained as priests and bishops can co-exist with those that believe female priests and bishops are anathema, going against church Tradition. Along with this came the concept of “sustainability” – the belief that each church should be able to afford a full-time rector and that each diocese should be able to afford a full-time bishop.

These two concepts have a real chance of tearing the ACNA apart. The only thing that could possibly prevent this re-enactment of the Tower of Babel is Pentecost. Only through a mutual, shared divine Love can the ACNA continue. Only through the common language of Love can we understand one another. And only through the Love of the Holy Spirit will we be able to

attain to that which the Lord, and not Man, wants for His Church.

This is also true for MDAS. We have a diversity of worship: some use the 1928 BCP, some the 2019, and still others the American or the Anglican Missal. We have some that are more evangelical, some who are more charismatic, and others who are more Anglo-Catholic. The only thing that holds us together is mutual, divine Love. And the only way we can understand each other is through the language of Love.

Therefore, let us resolve to be the people of Pentecost, not Babel. Let us accept Bishop Lipka’s call for Unity, Joy, Protection and Sanctification. And let us realize that the only way we can do this is through a stance of Love, and not just any love, but a divine Love, an agape Love; the Love of the Holy Spirit. And please remember in all that we do:

*“Unless the Lord builds the house,
their labor is in vain who build it.*

Unless the Lord keeps the city,

The watchman keeps vigil in vain.” [Psalm 127:1-2; 2019 BCP]

Amen,

The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

Vicar General for the Convocation of the West

Human Barriers, Divine Fusion

By Bishop Winfield Mott

There are three great festivals in the Christian year: Christmas, Easter and, uh,....the other one. Why does Pentecost not rank as equal to the other two in the public mind? It is an interesting question on which to speculate. But it is clear that Christmas and Easter are celebrated with enthusiasm, whereas Pentecost passes by every year with scarcely a mention. Even Pentecostals give it little notice.

It may be that Pentecost is a festival of the Holy Spirit, whereas western Christianity is very Christocentric (for instance, how often do you pray to the Holy Spirit instead of the Father or Jesus?). Or is it that Pentecost is about us doing something, rather than God doing something for us? We are, after all, a consumer society and the Church tends to market its services by explaining how you will benefit from them, not for what you can give.

Nevertheless, Pentecost is not only a great festival, but also holds the key to how the Christian life should be conducted. Plus, it is more than time to restore the balance in the western Church, both to reflect the seamless integration of the Persons of the Trinity, and to pay attention to the work of the Holy Spirit among us.

All three festivals present a narrative of birth.

Christmas features the birth of the baby Jesus, the Nativity, the entrance of God as incarnate onto earth. Easter is about the

new birth into everlasting life. As we have died with Christ, so we are raised with him in the new birth of baptism, born again into resurrected life. Pentecost is the birthday of the Church, the Divine breath blown into the community of disciples to enable the living Body of Christ to function, filled with and guided by the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who walks with us today. Even in the Eucharist, it is the Holy Spirit who implements the Presence of Christ among us in epiclesis.

Even the lessons read at Easter suggest that we are not just passive consumers, that as Christ has been raised, we are also called to a new life, throwing away the old sour leaven to live a new lifestyle, replacing malice and wickedness with sincerity and truth (see 1 Corinthians 5:8). It is the assignment of the Holy Spirit to work with us, infusing us daily with the inspiration to carry this out.

The task began dramatically on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit gave birth to the community of Christ. The disciples were gathered that day, as was already their custom since Easter, to celebrate the Resurrection with the Eucharist.

Three major themes dominate the Spirit’s message, as expressed by St. Peter’s sermon (see Acts 2).

1. The Resurrection means salvation is offered to all mankind, not just to Jews. The Church will be all who accept that free gift,

- bestowed through baptism, and,
2. The great task of the community is to live as the new people of God, and,
 3. To thoroughly and enthusiastically disseminate the Gospel message to all mankind.

The themes have not changed. A contemporary Pentecostal celebration needs to review what these basic concepts demand for our Church now.

The core of the Church is orthodox Faith, St. Peter's message that Jesus has died and risen in order to give us the free gift of salvation, motivated by love and grace. Note that the core is not righteous living, social or political issues, patriotic/ tribal commitments, or civilization. A church without the orthodox core of Resurrection is no Church. In such case, our faith would be in vain, as St. Paul notes. It does matter what you believe. Likewise, it is pointless to co-exist in a community in which some maintain the Faith and others do not. A Church without the Gospel has no Christian message and therefore cannot validly identify as "Christian." People who reject that orthodox core may be nice people, good citizens and dedicated givers. But the community of the Resurrected Christ, as constituted and continued by the Holy Spirit, is defined by the commitment to Resurrected Faith and expresses this in gathering continually at the Eucharistic Table.

Likewise, "all mankind" (Peter quotes this term from the prophet Joel) means all mankind. This is a radical departure from the core of Judaism, which defines itself as an inherited religion. While Gentiles can convert to Judaism, it is seen as exceptional. The first major controversy in the Church was about this, as the disciples wrestled with the radical concept, new to them, of a Faith mandated for all mankind.

Nor is this of historical interest only. The Body of Christ continues to wrestle with the tension between the human tendency to erect barriers between people and the Holy Spirit's imperative that we are fused into the Body of Christ without distinction. Through many centuries, including the current one, the Church has been replete with barriers, seen and unseen, reflecting human differences of race, economics, sexual orientation, ethnicities, socio-political ideologies, cultural barriers, different concepts of civilization, among others. On the day of Pentecost, the Galilean peasant disciples were miraculously empowered to speak in a great variety of languages to proclaim the Gospel, making the point that all people are intended to hear the Gospel. The New Testament frequently repeats the importance of universal access to salvation and inclusion into the Body, right through to St. John's heavenly vision (Revelation 7) of the great host of the redeemed, massed before the Throne without human differentiation.



Currently, now that self-interested leaders have chosen to re-open the wounds of the racial divides which tortured our nation from its start, we as Christians need to be especially clear on two points: **1)** God has created one race, the human species. While each of us is a unique child of God, differences of whatever attribute do not divide. In Christ, we are one. We must therefore reject the politics of pigment, along with any other attempt to erect barriers within the family of God. **2)** The Church has only one category of people: sinners. Humanity has an unfortunate unity in sharing universally in possessing a sinful nature. Therefore, the Church is the gathered community of sinners, without exception. There are no divisions in that community. There is only the misery of sin and the joy of forgiveness. Racial divides, among other human barriers, do not exist in the family of God.

This has been the clear communication of the Holy Spirit since the birthday of the Church on Pentecost. It is not about tolerance. "There is neither Jew nor Greek," says Paul. This is about the abolition of divides, not the toleration of them. As Christians, we are fused together into the Body, undifferentiated, all of us sinners, all of us blest with the unmerited grace of God.

The ramifications of a unified Church may surprise some. Of course, it indicts the congregation which, by subtle or blatant means, maintains itself as racially segregated or does not welcome people because of whatever barriers. But it is also interesting that some denominations which consider themselves quite "woke" denote departments as "ethnic ministry" or "ministry to Black communities," or similar. Such divisions suggest that there are "normal" folks who do not require differentiation and the diverse "others," different from "us."

The history of Christianity in America has frequently been a history of human barriers. Where that continues, it needs to be challenged and stopped, in the same radical way that Jesus transformed the Faith from the property of an exclusive people into a gift for all mankind. What cannot be evaded today is the confusion caused by the frequent perversion of Christianity back into exclusions and barriers. We cannot undo that history which sadly makes evangelism very difficult. But we can refuse to accept a church life containing barriers. The Holy Spirit's Pentecost message may be one which those committed to maintaining the barriers are not keen on hearing.

Nevertheless, it is a message in reality of great joy. We are all God's children, we are all loved by Him, without distinction or divide. However controversial, It is time to transcend the barriers, abolish them, pro-actively.

And, when we do that, we will find a powerful ally with us, the Holy Spirit.