

Abide in Christ

We Are Easter People

By MOST REVEREND JOHN C. WESTER, ARCHBISHOP OF SANTA FE

Often we hear it said that we Christians are an "Easter People." This is quite true. Nevertheless, what does that mean? I suppose it can mean many things, all of which are rooted in Christ's resurrection, His triumphant victory over sin and death. Most importantly, it means that our faith is not in vain: "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). In our baptisms, we became one with the risen Christ as we received the promise of eternal life, the first stages of which we already celebrate as members of the Church, one with God the Father and with each other as the Body of Christ. It follows, then, that one very important aspect of this faith is unity. Through His passion and resurrection, Jesus conquers those things that divide us: sin and death. Christ unites us to Himself and as brothers and sisters of Christ, we become one with each other. Easter is a clarion call for unity: unity with our God and with one another.

John's Gospel gives us a glimpse into the heart of Christ who prayed so fervently for unity: "And I have given them the glory you gave Me, so that they may be one as we are one..." (John 17:22). This unity is something that Christ feels very passionately. It is not frosting on the cake or a nice goal among so many others. It is essential to being a Christian



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and it is the fruit of the resurrection.

Our blessed Lord must have had many a moment of sadness when He witnessed such disunity around Him: Romans occupying His land, religious leaders quarreling over any number of issues and the rivalries between groups of people such as the Jewish people and the Samaritans. However, the most painful of all must

have been the tensions and divisions among His own followers. We see evidence of real discord between the political views of Christ's apostles and in their understanding of His message. There were jealousies and petty rivalries between them. No wonder Jesus prayed so fervently just before His passion. Are we any better? Look at all that divides us in our church and in our country today.

We see sad divisions between conservatives and liberals, those who see Vatican II as primarily opening the windows and others who see it more as going back to the sources (*aggiornamento* v. *ressourcement*). There are those who fly the banner of Pope Benedict XVI and others who favor Pope Francis. These divisions, and so many more, reflect the divisions in our country today as we debate such issues as pro-life, gun safety, immigration, and climate change. Despite all these divisions, we must never forget the challenge of the Gospel and the message of the resurrection: we are one in Christ. We can and will have our disagreements but we must never

forget Christ's prayer that we be one. How do we accomplish this?

Maintaining unity with each other is a daunting task. How do I remain united to the person I am debating, especially if the debate is something about which I feel passionate. While there is much one could say in response, I would suggest three ideas.

First, it is critical to listen. I notice that when I am engaged in a lively conversation (an argument, in other words) I do not always listen attentively to what the other person is saying. Rather, I wait for that person to breathe in so I can get in my licks. Unity depends on genuine, attentive and careful listening, a listening that tries to hear not only the words but also the conviction, the emotion and the truth behind what the person is saying. I must also listen with the idea of learning. This brings me to my second point: humility. Unity depends on the virtue of humility and is fostered by it. If I believe that I have all the answers, that I have nothing to learn or that mine is the only possible view, then the discussion will no doubt do more to divide than unite. More and more I have tried to say to someone with whom I was having a disagreement, "You may be right." It stopped that person in his tracks and it cued me to be a bit more humble about my position. Finally, forgiveness is essential to unity. We are bound to offend one another when in the midst of a disagreement, especially in the heat of the moment. It is essential to forgive and to ask for forgiveness. This signals that while we may disagree on the issue, we

see our relationship as something that is not worth compromising.

These three ideas of listening, humility and forgiveness are reflected in the Lord's Passion, which we just commemorated and celebrated liturgically during Holy Week. Jesus listened intently to His Father in the garden of Gethsemane. He took up His cross with humility and He forgave His executioners. Jesus modeled for us the path to unity, a unity made possible by His resurrection from the dead.

Unity, real unity, is never achieved by using the tools of the world: power, money, violence and political chicanery. Rather, it is accomplished when we allow the light of the Gospel and Christ's resurrection to shine brightly on the sad divisions that afflict our Church, our country and our world. We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song. That means we must seek unity at all times. It does not take a backseat to the other issues of the day. It is THE issue, the fervent and intimate prayer of our Savior and the demand of the Gospel. May this Easter bring you and your loved ones many blessings, especially the gift of unity.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

+ John C. Wester

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His Mercy
Endures Forever