

Loving God, your Son prayed that we might be one, so that world might believe. Open our hearts and minds. In Jesus name. Amen

Thank you Father Michael for offering me the opportunity to offer a reflection at this service. I tried to get him to do it and he said, "It's your place. You can do the homily."

I heard of some visitors to a small city. They were driven around by their hosts and shown all the churches in the town. There was, it seemed, a church on every corner. "See how much we love the Lord!" the host said to his guests. "Yep," said one of the guests, "You must surely love the Lord and really hate each other." It's a sad commentary on Christian history but if there's one thing we are good at its disagreeing. So much so that there are more churches and more denominations than you can shake a stick at. Almost every day a new church with a new name opens up. Someone with a few mates, and off they go.

This was never Jesus' intention. In fact Jesus' intention was very different.

The sentence tonight is from John's gospel. Jesus is at prayer and knowing that soon he must leave the disciples he loves, he prays for them - and for us. John gives us the privilege of seeing Jesus at prayer. To see someone at prayer is to see their heart. And Jesus' heartfelt desire is for our unity. He prays that we might be one so that the world might believe. That we might be one. The reverse is also true, if we aren't one, if we have given way to the sin of division, how can we expect others to believe? Another way of saying this is, if we Christians can't get our house in order, how do we expect anybody else to want to join us? I've heard it often enough: "Look at those Christians fighting among themselves." Rather we are called, as Paul puts, it to be ministers of reconciliation to the world.

Today, Ash Wednesday, begins the season of prayer and fasting and acts of mercy to enable us to celebrate Easter and Jesus' resurrection. What would it be like this Lent to fast from criticizing other Christians? Sometimes we are guilty of thinking, not the best of our brother and sisters, but the worst. If we are to grow together we need to bring our best to each other. What would it be like to pray for unity, to join in Jesus' prayer that we might be one that the world might believe? What would it be like as act of charity to share at a deeper level with other Christians? For example tonight we are Roman Catholics, Methodists and Anglicans. We all have the same Sunday readings why not have combined Bible study groups? To our list of sins we need to add denominationalism. I can't do much about it on my own, Father Sam can't do

much about it on his own, but all together as a people of God we can do something about the division in our Christian family.

To be sure our churches are growing closer.

When Pope Paul VI gave his episcopal ring to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, and placed it on his finger in 1966, the Pope said to the Archbishop: "You have rebuilt a bridge which, for centuries, has lain fallen between the Church of Rome and the Church of Canterbury. "

Many bridges were built last year in October when Archbishop Justin came to Rome to celebrate fifty years of that first meeting in Rome and of the opening of the Centre. He brought with him his own pectoral cross – a Cross of Nails – which he put into the hands of Pope Francis... who stunned the congregation by taking it, kissing it, and putting it round his own neck. Archbishop Justin took home a gift of even greater significance: a crosier; the staff of a bishop; modelled on the crosier of St Gregory the Great and given in San Gregorio al Celio, the church from which Pope Gregory sent St Augustine to Canterbury in 595. Sometimes, only symbols can sum up just how far we have come.

The Anglican Representative in Rome, Archbishop David Moxon, said, "The challenge is to transcend the old ways of fighting or leaving, to find a new way of discovering what integrity we can trust in each other by virtue of the fruits of our baptism and by how much we may be prepared to live respectfully with what diversity God has given us."

The Methodists and the Anglicans in Aotearoa also have a covenant of mutually working together.

ARCIC the joint Roman Catholic and Anglican commission has concluded. Controversy between our two communions has centred on the Eucharist, on the meaning and function of ordained ministry, and on the nature and exercise of authority in the Church. Although we are not yet in full communion, what the Commission has done has convinced us that substantial agreement on these divisive issues is now possible.

My intuition is that if we wait for the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope to bring about unity we will be waiting a very long time. I think what we need to be doing is more of what we are doing tonight. The key I believe is to think globally but act locally.

And Jesus knelt and prayed, "Father may they be one, that the world may believe."  
Amen

- *Nick Mountfort*