

3 Sunday A – Fr. Val Handwerker

January 22, 2017

Cathedral

8:00 and 10:00

Theme: Beyond heroes to Christ, who calls *us* “to come after” him and be his disciples.

“Is Christ divided?”—It was a rhetorical question raised by the Apostle Paul.

It was two blocks from my home in North Memphis: McLean Baptist Church, at the corner of Jackson and McLean. An imposing white-brick church, whenever I, as a boy, rode my bicycle by there...well, I felt uncomfortable. I wondered what *they* did inside, but I would never fathom to go inside. You just couldn't do that. My church home was just down the street on Jackson: Little Flower Catholic Church. I belonged. I was at home there.

“Is Christ divided?”—so the Apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthian church. Then he continues: **“For it has been reported to me about you, sisters and brothers, that there are rivalries among you.”**

Last Sunday we listened to the introductory greeting of this letter from Paul, written to a young church, founded some fifteen years after the death and rising of Christ. With no more than 100 members, this church was snarled up in conflict, about ready to implode from within.

There were cliques, aligned to different heroes:

- **“I belong to Apollos”**—known back then as a slick preacher
- **“I belong to Cephas”** (another name for Simon Peter)—known as the head guy
- **“I belong to Paul.”**

The Apostle Paul then warns *us* of the dangers of clinging to heroes—of whatever stripe—rather than aligning ourselves to Christ. In our time we might claim—

- I'm a Pope Francis' guy.
- No, I'm in step with Pope John Paul II. *He's* orthodox.
- I'm with Mother Angelica's EWTN

- No, I line up with Sister Joan Chittister and her following.

In the wider society, too, we know there are painful factions. Our nation faces factions which split us and test the dreams of our democracy.

Timely, then, we hear this Sunday Apostle Paul writing, **“I urge you...that there be no divisions among you.”** He warns of the dangers of clinging to heroes rather to Christ.

For more than a hundred years this third week of January is called “The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.” Exactly a year ago Pope Francis preached on this—about our shared efforts to work together among the varied Christian communions. He applauded the varied ways churches collaborate in ministry and outreach. We of the Cathedral Parish certainly do so here in midtown and beyond.

Pope Francis put it like this: “Beyond the differences which still separate us...there is always a call from God himself...(The Lord) chooses and calls us to be His disciples.” (1)

Yes, in the Gospel today Jesus called his first close disciples. **“Come after me...”** he said to Simon Peter and Andrew, to John and James. And you know, they were flawed in so many ways, but Jesus never gave up on them. He graced them. **“Come after me...”** Jesus now says to us, and he never gives up on us. We too are flawed, but graced.

Beyond heroes, my friends: We’re called solely to cling to Christ. Then, his healing will take place, first within us. Only after that, his healing will take place through us.

(1) Pope Francis, Homily of January 25, 2016, quoted in Give Us This Day—January 2017 (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), pg. 203.