

THE DEEPEST YEARNING – LENT 2022

“How pleasant and good it is when sisters and brothers live together in unity”

PSALM 133: 1

My Sisters and Brothers in the Lord.

LENT is a time in the Christian year when we are invited to spend a time with the Word and reflecting upon the meaning and impact of our Biblical inheritance.

I am proposing that this year, as our Lenten discipline, we engage in study and prayer around the issue of CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. To this end, I would like to offer you every week during the Lenten season a study on the general theme which you might “do” at your own pace and leisure. Because of the uncertainty which still creeps around as I write this (the end of February 2022), I am suggesting that we do this weekly study on our own and that hopefully we can gather en famille in the week after Easter to share what we have learned from this “apart time together”.

With this in mind, I want to introduce the study this week, with the first session being sent out at the beginning of the week of February 28th. So, with no further adieu...

The greatest single yearning we have as humans is to be in community with others. By our nature, we are social beings, wanting and needing communities of like-minded persons to bring out of us a sense of wholeness. In his book A Different Drummer Scott Peck tells us that this need and longing for community is both our greatest strength and the greatest missing part of what John Powell says “makes us truly human, truly alive.”

The Christian Church has known this need and longing for community since her birthing in the upper room of that house in Jerusalem and its enlivening in the Pentecost moment. The true strength of the Church has been her deep sense of community and fellowship, and her recognition that only when a community spirit flourishes will she be an effective and dynamic instrument of God’s grace. In spite of knowing this, the Church in North America has by and large lost this glue that binds us together in the unity spoken of in Psalm 133. IF she fails to reconnect with her communal roots, the Church I fear will continue to fragment until she dies from a lack of focus, a centre point and a reason for being other than her own self-preservation.

This study is about The Body of Christ, the Church. It is about our need to re-affirm our commitment as a community to He who is above all names, Jesus Christ the Lord, for he alone is the head and cornerstone of the faith community. At a meeting of the Anglican

bishops at Lambeth, the 1990's were declared as the "decade for evangelism" in which we were to go into all the world with the gospel good news.

As Edward Patey says in Open the Doors "we cannot be about the business of God out there until we have been evangelized within." Sadly, some thirty years have passed since Patey's book crept around the edges of Anglicanism and we have not progressed overly far in our need to both understand and know the incredible good news which God has wanted us to have and to enter the marketplace and offer to share what we FEEL and KNOW with others.

We shall be unashamedly Biblical in our approach – from the earliest Church as described by Luke in the Book of Acts to the convictions of Paul in his letters to the birthing communities of faith scattered throughout the Roman world.

A common thread is the conviction that the Christian Church from the first moment has denied the rugged individualism which so dominates our culture today and affirms our mutual interdependence with all who Call Jesus Lord and Saviour. The Christian faith is a CORPORATE one, rooted in the deep commitment to the Risen Lord and to the fellowship which he instituted.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, just before his imprisonment and execution by the Nazis wrote in his book Life Together these words: IT IS ONLY BY THE GRACE OF GOD THAT A CONGREGATION IS PERMITTED TO GATHER TOGETHER IN THIS WORLD TO SHARE THE WORD AND SACRAMENTS...THE PHYSICAL PRESENCE OF OTHER CHRISTIANS IS A SOURCE OF INCOMPARABLE JOY AND STRENGTH TO THE BELIEVER ...AND THE BELIEVER FEELS NO SENSE OF SHAME WHEN HE YEARNS FOR THE PHYSICAL PRESENCE OF OTHER CHRISTIANS (BECAUSE THE OTHER IS) A PHYSICAL SIGN OF THE PRESENCE OF THE TRIUNE GOD...CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IS A GIFT FROM GOD WHICH WE CANNOT CLAIM. ONLY GOD KNOWS THE REAL STATE OF OUR FELLOWSHIP. WHAT MAY APPEAR WEAK AND TRIFLING TO US MAY APPEAR GREAT AND GLORIOUS TO GOD. THE COMMUNITY OF THE SPIRIT IS THE FELLOWSHIP OF THOSE WHO ARE CALLED BY CHRIST; IN THE COMMUNITY OF THE SPIRIT THERE BURNS THE BRIGHT LOVE OF AGAPE SERVICE AND JESUS CHRIST ALONE IS OUR UNITY..."

Our common task is to explore our community roots under the headship of Jesus and to make our parish, our Christian family more what he wants us to be. I throw out only ONE caution: this study is not designed to be a "complainer's heaven" but rather we seek the

Biblical and spiritual roots of our fellowship and together journey towards that which will make us more faithful to our Lord's call to "follow me and I shall make you fishers of the world."

Here is a short summary of our work ahead:

WEEK ONE – The roots of Christian Community in the Gospels and the Book of Acts

WEEK TWO - Community in the Letter of Paul to the Romans

WEEK THREE – Community among the Corinthians

WEEK FOUR – To the Sisters and Brothers in Ephesus and Galatia

WEEK FIVE – What say we to those in Philippi, Thessalonika and Colossea?

WEEK SIX – Gathering to share the Adventure

May God be with us all and may we all be strengthened and renewed in our time together even if we are still physically apart.

THERE ARE ONLY THREE THINGS YOU NEED: SOME PAPER, A WRITING INSTRUMENT AND AN OPEN MIND!

Fr. Michael

February 21, 2022

Metcalf, Ontario