

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit+
(Based on Ephesians 2:19-22, and John 17:13-18)

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God....members of the household of God.

St Paul throughout his letter to the Ephesians is calling us to remember the great change of status that Christ Jesus has bestowed upon the baptized.

Luther refers to this change of status as *Froliche Wechsel/Happy Exchange*.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,no longer are we, God's creatures trapped in our sins, strangers to His kingdom, alienated from, the bright light of the Trinity's love.

No longer strangers and aliens are we through our Lord's passion, death, and resurrection ---but Christ has built for us a new residence..... now we are **fellow citizens and members of the household of God.**

Members of the household of God---Here in this new status, we have been transferred by the mighty and gracious actions of Christ Jesus and he has plunked us down, formed us into a new creation, a household, placing the baptized under one roof.

If that isn't Good News than nothing is!

And the news only gets better: "*members of the Household of God*" And in this Household, we are fellow citizens—in the Greek, this works out to mean—fellow politicians. Isn't that great news? We are fellow politicians. Certainly, that is a breath of life-giving air, in this age of identity politics.

Baptism is the wellspring of our identity. This identity supersedes Republicans/Democrats, liberals and conservatives, capitalist/socialists.

Our political fellowship in the Household of faith supersedes all earthly categories. Our identity politics of Baptism is simply everything....this identity is the Alpha and Omega of all identities.

As fellow politicians of the Lord Jesus, we are here tonight in the middle of Lent. Lent this rich season that drives us to swim in the deep waters of our baptismal identities---

Preparing for the Great Christian Holy Week---all of this taking place in the Household of faith. A Household built upon the firm foundation of the apostles and prophets, with the cornerstone of this edifice being none other than Christ himself!

So here we are today, fellow politicians together with the saints. Actually, we are standing in the middle of two—St Patrick yesterday, and St Joseph, the Guardian of our Lord tomorrow. (*Holy Office as guardian*)

But in the year 2020 of our Lord what is the condition of the Household? How unified are we? Jesus' prayer **That they may be one---** is never more necessary than it is today, as Christianity is under assault on many fronts, and yet it seems it is a prayer never more unanswered.

St Cyprian of Carthage said: **Any Schism in Holy Mother Church is a sin against Christ.** With Cyprian in mind, the landscape of the Household of faith seems pretty grim. We know of the 2 great schisms first in the 11c between the Eastern churches in Constantinople and the Western church in Rome. And then, of course, the 16th-century schism in which we continue to participate into this very day.

Here at Calvary, we are given a tangible reminder of the 16th c schism every weekend, as we come down Calhoun some vehicles turning one way to go to the Lutheran mass and others turning another way to go to the Roman Catholic mass. In light of Jesus praying that we may all be one—we have accepted this separation as normal, hardly giving it much thought beyond, trying to avoid the vehicle turning in the opposite direction from where we are headed.

Theologian Michael Root has this to say about such separation: *We need reminders of division, not anesthesia; numbing our pain as if it doesn't matter.*

This ecumenical anesthesia has contributed to a sense of amnesia pulling the Household of God into what some have called an ecumenical winter. Nothing hopeful seems to be happening as the various communions of faith have hunkered down in our own little corners of the Household.

On Reformation Sunday of 1999, Diane and I had the joy of squeezing into a packed Lutheran congregation in Chicago to celebrate the JDJF, an agreement signed earlier that day in Augsburg Germany. An agreement between Roman Catholics and Lutherans on the doctrine of Justification by Grace. Both sides agreed that the 16th c condemnations were hurled at each other, no longer applied. And so the worship began that evening with bishops and dignitaries present from both sides. Lutheran Catholics and Romans Catholics elbow to elbow, standing as the processional moved into the church, together as One Household of God we stood and we sang with joy and thanksgiving "A Mighty Fortress is our God." I thought to myself that truly this was Luther's dream, a united Household with its foundation *firmly built on the apostles, prophets with Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.*

But just a few years later the cold winds of the ecumenical winter seemed to set in...and the joy and hope for the future seemed hard to find. The scandal in the priesthood began to surface in the Roman church. Lutherans in this country were too busy worshipping the Zeitgeist and not the Heilige Geist.

2017 marked the 500 anniversary of the Reformation. My first sense about 2017 was this: As Lutherans, we needed to not be about a sense of Triumphalism, but rather we should be down on our knees in a spirit of Repentance, for we have made of mess of things. Thinking back to Cyprian,... there are more Lutheran groups than cherry trees in Door County.

Take my immediate family, for example. My sister is ELCA, my father is LCMS, I am NALC and my confessor is WELS. The divisions in Lutheranism, let alone the whole Household of God are painfully obvious. All of these divisions seem so counter to Jesus' missionary prayer in John 17: **As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.** Yes, on the one hand, it seems that in the Household of God with its countless visible divisions we have been deaf to the prayer of its Lord...*that they may be One.*

So in the year of our Lord 2020, where do we turn? We who have made a mess of the Household, what is our course, our path forward? Well no matter what the year or the season—repentance is always a good place to begin—and in that repentance, we may just be led back to the One source of true unity---the One who we are hearing in fervent/passionate prayer for His Holy Household. In John 17 we are like eavesdroppers. We are like Sarah with our ears to the tent wall listening attentively to a Divine Conversation taking place.

As we are listening in, we are hearing the overwhelming Love our Lord has for His flock, for his Church. At the threshold of His passion, Jesus pauses to Pray to His Father.

To pray fervently for you and for me—for His very Household of faith.

Jesus, earlier in John's Gospel has let it be known that He is the Good Shepherd, and this prayer bears that out... You and I know how wonderful it is to hear someone saying: "*I am praying for you.*" We are greatly strengthened by such a word. Just how glorious it is then to know for certain that it is Jesus the very Son of God who is praying for you and for me! And Jesus is doing so because of what He has done...

I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they are not of the world. Jesus in prayer to his Father knows that we will need his protection. The very protection of the Father himself.

Luther puts it this way: *Here I have the Word of my Lord Christ, yes, the Word of almighty heavenly Father. I know and I am certain that, if I cling to it, no power on earth nor the gates of hell can harm me, for He is holding me in his Almighty hand and Fatherly protection, from which no one can tear away.*”

For he holds His Word dear and intends to keep it and therefore, to protect and defend all who cling to it...for the dear children are in such need of protection..... For in the world you will have to hear that you are a heretic, the devil's own and the greatest abomination on earth. The name of Christ outweighs and exceeds all other wickedness in the world, and there is no greater sin or shame than to be a Christian. The world will put you to death and think they are doing God a favor.

Here Luther is sounding quite contemporary. Perhaps for the first time in N. America Christians are starting to realize that to follow Christ, to be citizens of the Household of God makes us aliens and strangers to the contemporary culture.

The Good News is, though we may be strangers and aliens here on earth---we are no longer strangers and aliens to the One Lord Jesus Christ who is praying on our behalf.

They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth.

Sanctify them in your truth...only in the Truth of Christ, crucified, risen and ascended Lord are we the Household of God able to participate in the Highly Priestly prayer.

Ecumenical relations within the Household of God will have no chance of bearing fruit if they are based on warm feelings, anecdotal stories from years gone by. Sitting around the campfire holding hands and feeling good about ourselves is not what the Lord is praying for. “Get along to go along” is not an avenue that is open to us. Only in the truth of the Word, only in the truth of the faith once delivered to the saints. Only these particulars are given to us.

So what must we be about as fellow citizens of the Household of God in the year of our Lord 2020?

First of all, we pray and remember that the Unity of the Household is always beholding to the Holy Spirit that is calling, gathering and sanctifying the whole church on earth.

Secondly, that very Spirit has given the church gifts in addition to the sevenfold gifts we receive at Baptism. Places of unity, that we do have are things like a Common Lectionary—those series of Readings Sunday after Sunday. For example, this coming Sunday the Word of God that we are hearing at Calvary is the same Word our brothers and sisters will be hearing across the street.

Thirdly: In the Holy Eucharist—the Lord’s Supper Jesus is presiding and fully present. Here at Calvary and across the street, and in other parts of the Household of God. Here in the mystery of the Lord’s Supper, we are truly One. It is also the Spirit that enables us to both recognize and honor each other's sacramental practices, and honor them even if we may not agree with them. For example, I have found myself at times at a Roman Mass for a funeral or a wedding. If the priest should invite me to the altar—that is a nice gesture of hospitality and goodwill. However it is not based in truth---and so I will politely say no thank you, I will wait until our two bodies have agreement on this matter of the Household.

But that is not the end of it. During the distribution as I remain in the pew, I am in fervent prayer for the church and its unity, praying together with Jesus in the Spirit for an outcome that only Divine actions can bring about.

So there can be times when it is true and right to fast from the Eucharist—for the sake of the whole Household of God.

Lent brings the baptized into such disciplines. Recalling our Lord’s Words back on Ash Wednesday: **when you give, when you pray, when you fast....** These Lenten disciplines can be the pathway, where our Lord is pulling us ever deeper into his passionate intimately loving prayer—that we may be One.

Can we not be praying diligently as citizens of the Household of God, praying that we may come together in the One who is praying for us?

Can we give our lives to this Household of faith, together with others for the sake of our Lord’s prayer—that we may be one?

Can we fast when necessary from the Lord’s Supper, acknowledging the Lord’s body and not our own?

Yes, these things are truly possible for the Household of God when they are located in the One Lord who is praying for us. The One Lord who has fasted—fasted from life itself.

It is that same Lord who is praying and fasting in order to give himself freely to his beloved bride the church...

A Household of faith built upon the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone....In him, you are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. AMEN.