

Church Unity Third Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday, January 23, 2018 8:15 AM 2
Sm 6:12b-15, 17-19; **Mk 3:31-35** (St. Vincent, deacon and martyr; St. Marianne Cope, virgin) **Church Unity Octave** (We are praying for the kind of serene faith that is very willing to share itself in dialogue, that is humble enough to accept correction from a larger community and is, therefore, in service to the God who has inspired it.)

“For whoever does the will of God is brother and sister and mother to me.”

This is a very good reading for this week which is the week of Church Unity or the **Octave of Church Unity**. It was emphasized back at the time of Pope John XXIII, now St. John XXIII, and it is **the desire to bring all those who believe in Christ together in some form of unity**, not necessarily within one structure, but **with fundamental agreement about what the gospel is and what we believe in**.

Now fifty years ago the scene of religion in the world was very different from today. Fifty years ago there was much more seeming agreement, on the surface, among Christian people, and among non-Christian people there was very little controversy. **In the last fifty years we have seen within Christianity the rise of a very rogue form of evangelical religion**, which espouses extremely weird, odd, unhistorical beliefs, and **which promotes a sort of rigidity and unwillingness to dialogue**, that is of great concern, **and we see the rise of a rather radical form of Islam**.

Now it might be good to look at the fact that **true authentic faith is always, of its nature, authentic faith is always serene**. It is the quality of real faith. **Faith is a gift from God**. It is a virtue that is given. It is not actually something completely natural, **although there is a natural kind of faith as well**. Simply accepting life, living life with gratitude is a kind of natural faith. **But God has seen the need to fulfill natural faith with a more supernatural and robust kind of revelation**. Nonetheless **natural faith and supernatural faith should be very harmonious**; it should always lead to a kind of **basic serenity**.

But there are forms of faith that human beings have made up that are anything but serene. They are aggressive, one-sided, radical, fanatical; this is not ever authentic faith. It doesn't matter what a fanatic believes. **The mere fact that a fanatic is a fanatic means that his or her faith is not authentic. All true authentic faith must lead to the same place, which is union with God,** because all authentic faith must come from the same Spirit. Even natural faith is coming from the same God, who created everything and who sustains everything in being.

So as we pray for unity, we have to understand what we are praying for. **We are praying for the kind of serene faith that is very willing to share itself in dialogue, that is humble enough to accept correction from a larger community and is, therefore, in service to the God who has inspired it.** On the other hand, **there can be no fanaticism within the house of faith,** true faith, true faith that will not admit any form of fanaticism, regardless of the so-called convictions or beliefs or values of the fanatics. Likewise **the house of God cannot actually sustain rigidity and an unwillingness to dialogue and to share and to witness.** That would all be a kind of denial of faith. So we have to be aware of what we are actually praying for in this Octave of Church Unity.