

Reflection Wednesday Week 3 Conversion of St Paul 2023

Saul, the young man who looked after the cloaks of the men who were stoning St Stephen, grew into a dedicated and efficient persecutor of Christians. Today's feast celebrates the day that Christ appeared to him on his way to Damascus and reproached him for his persecution. This experience led to his conversion.

Today marks the closing of the Week of prayer for Christian Unity which is a continual theme in all our prayer gatherings and eucharists.

Pope Francis spoke about the urgent need for Unity among all Christians:

"The full restoration of communion among all the believers in Jesus Christ is an irrevocable commitment for every Christian, for the 'unity of all' (Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom) is not only God's will but an urgent priority in today's world."

Christians are called to work toward the restoration of unity "not merely through signed agreements but through fidelity to the Father's will and discernment of the promptings of the Spirit. Much attention has rightly been placed on the historical and theological reasons at the origin of our divisions. This shared study must continue and develop in a spirit that is neither polemical nor apologetic but marked instead by authentic dialogue and mutual openness.

We must likewise acknowledge that divisions are the result of sinful actions and attitudes which impede the work of the Holy Spirit, who guides the faithful into unity in legitimate diversity. It follows that only growth in holiness of life can lead to genuine and lasting unity. Patriarch Bartholomew supports the decision to set a date to make unity a reality in 2025. This will mark the 1,700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.

When my son, William, was young, we belonged to a small country church. On Communion Day, deacons would pass around the "bread and grape-juice." One Sunday, we attended a church out of town that was more formal. What our church called bread and grape-juice, this one referred to as *elements*, a word William didn't understand. As Communion began, the pastor said, "*If the deacons will come forward, the elements will pass among us.*" William was suddenly excited and I didn't know why. Then he leaned toward me, whispering something that caused me to burst out laughing. With all eyes on us, I took him by the hand and we made a hasty exit. All the way to the car, he protested. "*Mom, we're going to miss the circus. The pastor said the elephants were going to pass among us!*"