The Balance Between Unity and Diversity

This past Friday, October 11th, we had at our daily Mass a reading from Luke 11, where Jesus says: “Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and house will fall against house..” (Luke 11:17).

There’s a lot that can be unpacked there, but it’s hard not to think about some of the divisions in our country as we approach another election; magnified in this day and age by an endless news cycle and constant information online.

On the one hand, divisions are not always a bad thing; it’s good to have opinions, and many times politics and religion cross paths. We also believe in a distinctiveness to our Catholic faith. And we also have to stand for things we believe in; as such arguing, meaning making a point and trying to convince someone of truths can be a good thing. Arguing is not the same as shouting more loudly than the other person.

While differences are a good thing disunity and hate is not. If we truly hate people because they are different from us, we’re not understanding that Christ came to die for all, and that when we receive Communion it is meant to remind us too of the unity of all people as God’s children; indeed “union” is a big part of the word.

So how then do we get to that balance where we can be different but civil? Where we can strive for unity while at the same time recognizing it’s important to talk about what we believe in and why and stand firm in our principles?

For starters, something I go back to time and time again is the “personalistic norm”; it stems from Saint John Paul II who taught that being one is created in God’s image, the only appropriate response to a person is love. And if we start there, so much falls into place. We don’t look at a person for their body, their function or job, their wealth, their political ideology. We start by seeing the humanity, body and soul, and that really can help put other things into place.

We then think about how we respond to others. Anger is an emotion, but wrath is one of the deadly sins where anger gets out of control and we harbor resentment and grudges or truly hate a person. We can argue, but again, arguing isn’t screaming; it’s a way to understand people at a deeper level. Arguing helps us to understand the other person’s perspective and maybe we can find common ground, but at least agree to disagree; we may even convince the person of what we are arguing for, a good thing when we are trying to be an apologist for our faith.

Third, with that common ground, perhaps we can build new friendships? Ronald Reagan and Tip O’Neill were starkly different politically, but each had respect for the other. When there was an assassination attempt on Reagan, O’Neill was one of the first people the president let visit him at George Washington University Hospital. When O’Neill entered Regan’s hospital room, he walked over to his bed and grabbed his hands and said “God bless you, Mr. President.” Regan was still groggy with tubes and

needles in his body, but when he saw Tip, he lit up and gave him a smile and said "Thanks for coming, Tip." The Speaker of the House then got on his knees and offered a prayer for the president, choosing the 23rd Psalm, and kissed Regan on the forehead. Even with people whom we may disagree on many things, there is so often that common ground when we work for the greater good, and friendships can be forged when we realize perhaps we aren't as different as we think and have some things in common, a good attitude to have when trying to build up our country, and our Church.

Fourth, as they saying goes "kill them with kindness." If someone attacks you for your politics or faith, or they gossip about you, resist the urge to fight back with angry words. Rather remain calm and patient; try to have a conversation with them. Pray for them. What good does it to do keep upping the ante and trying to outdo a person or get them back? You'll go in an endless circle. Sometimes you can't do that, and in those cases try to forgive and let go. If you just get angrier or brood or seethe, they win, and you are letting them have power over you.

Fifth, as we argue, remember we do not have to be passive or fearful. Cowardice is the vice against fortitude, and we need to speak up for what we believe in. As I shared last week, recently I joined some of our parishioners at the *40 Hours for Life* event at Planned Parenthood to pray peacefully in Saint Paul. Some saw us and were instantly fueled with hate. But talking about what we believe in is important. Certainly that applies to the faith and moral teaching of the Catholic Church, but even in politics, I'd say be respectful, but don't feel like it's taboo to talk about because you lean one way or another. Scores of lives have been saved because of the witness of pro-life people praying at abortion centers, or giving someone information on how to choose life.

Sixth, think before you use social media. Never forget that it's real people you are talking to, so try not to tear down but rather to engage in discussion rather than attacks.

Seventh, try to think things through logically. We have emotions - a good thing - but sometimes we get so fired up on something we don't think it through. We can let our ego get in the way and say "this is how it's always been done" or "it will never work." When we look at things logically, we can both see wisdom in others, but make a better argument about the importance of something we believe in.

And lastly, remember sometimes things don't go the way we'd like, but the sun still rises tomorrow and there will still be time for change. So when things don't go the way we'd like wether it's in the parish, in the country, in the larger universal Church, don't give up. Don't leave the Church or give up on America or a person because it seems things aren't going well or they'll never "get it." Rather, stay involved, stay passionate, pray for the person and about the situation, but through it all, be patient. It takes time for mustard seeds to grow!

Every time I offer Mass, I am reminded that Jesus also challenges me to love all people, not just those who are easy to love, because His love was given without condition to

everyone. May we strive to do the same and not let our differences destroy our souls and our relationships with one another.

Have a great week!
Fr. Paul