



Bishop Galeone's Columns

United We Stand

By Bishop Victor Galeone

Retirement! How anxiously many of us look forward to the day we retire from our jobs! As some of you already know, this September I will celebrate my 75th birthday, which according to church law is the canonical age for a bishop to submit his letter of resignation. Normally, it takes a number of months for a successor to be appointed. Whether those months **are** many or few, the time remaining for me to serve as your bishop is limited.

During my pastoral visitations, I often ask members of the staff to express one desire they would like to see fulfilled for the benefit of their parish. As the end of my tenure draws near, I do have one desire that I long to see realized in our diocese – harmonious union.

On occasion I have heard the complaint expressed by parishioners, staff members and even some pastors that the goals of the diocese are counterproductive to the good of the parishes. This mindset saddens me. For while we must take into account individual parishes and their well-being, in the final analysis the diocese *is* your parishes, and your parishes *are* the diocese. Their spiritual, financial and material fates are mutually and inextricably linked. And so for both entities to thrive, a harmonious union is essential.

As an analogy of a “harmonious union,” I want to adapt that of “a choir of many singers” first used by St. Athanasius, an early Church Father: “A choir is composed of a variety of men, women and children, of both old and young. Under the direction of one conductor, each sings in a way that is natural for him: men with men’s voices, boys with boys’ voices, old people with old voices, young people with young voices. Yet all of them produce a single harmony.”

Applying this example to the case of a diocese with its parishes, it must be emphasized that a choir does not invent its own melody and lyrics as it proceeds. Rather, it’s the duty of the conductor and the choir members to adhere to the score produced by the genius of the composer, perhaps long since deceased. Similarly, God’s eternal Word took on our mortal flesh to reveal the truths of our faith by preaching the good news. In each diocese, the bishop – like a skilled conductor – leads the faithful to profess in mutual harmony the truths revealed by our Divine Composer. If some members should attempt to skew the faith by changing or denying key elements, their discordant notes turn what was once a harmony into a cacophony.

This analogy is similar to the one that St. Paul elaborated in 1st Corinthians 12, where he says that the body is not made up of one part but of many. And for the body to function in a healthy manner, all the parts – eyes, ears, hands, feet, etc. – must work in harmony. “God has combined the members of the body...so that there should be no division among the members, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now all of you together are the body of Christ, though each one is a different part of it.”

St. Paul states that there should be “no *division* among the members;” namely, there should be *union*, but not necessarily *uniformity*. Or as St. Augustine expressed it: “In essentials, *unity*; in non-essentials, *liberty*; in all things, *charity*.”

Harmonious union was also Jesus’ greatest wish before he died. Right before entering the garden to begin his agony, he prayed for us, the members of his Church: “I pray not only for these [disciples], but also for those who through their message will come to believe in me, that they all may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one in us so that the world may believe that you sent me.” (John 17:20-21) Our visible union is to be a living witness to the world of the saving truths that Jesus came to reveal!

How can we expect to achieve the unity Jesus desired among the split divisions of Christianity, if parishes continue to harbor an “us versus them” mentality regarding the diocese? Without the parishes, there is no *diocese*; and without the diocese, there are no *parishes* – just a disjointed mass of congregational assemblies.

So as I prepare to pass the helm on to my successor, there is no finer gift you could give me than for all the parishes to work in harmony with the diocese so that together we may make the unity Jesus prayed for a reality in this small corner of the Church universal.