

**Bishop Felipe J. Estévez' Homily for the Interfaith Prayer Service**  
St. Joseph Catholic Church, Jacksonville  
Sunday, January 15, 2012

*Romans 12: 9-18; Timothy 2: 1-6*

St. Paul calls us today to “look on the needs of the saints as your own; be generous in offering hospitality.” The Catholic Community rejoices today in welcoming our brothers and sisters in the Christian faith, in welcoming also all those who respect the name of God and all those open to the faith communities and appreciative of their contribution to the civic society. This place honors a very humble man, a worker, a family man: Joseph of Nazareth. The gospel of St. Mathew calls him a "dikaios", a man of integrity.

We gather at a time when 349 Christian churches in the whole world are reflecting and praying for greater unity, for a common witness and a greater consensus in serving our neighbor especially the needy. From the start, it was called the week of prayer for Christian unity. And this year the theme was chosen from 1 Corinthians 15:51-58: “We will all be changed by the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This year the reflection was prepared in Poland. A country which can teach humanity that victory comes often through many defeats. The Polish nation was threatened by several totalitarian systems but their strength, their powerful faith nurtured in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ led them to unity and confidence as a people called to be free.

Victory for us is deeply related to overcoming selfishness and serving one another: “weep with those who weep ... have the same attitude toward all. Put away ambitious thoughts and associate with those who are lowly.” The work for justice is integral to our faith and worship. The unity we seek is not simply getting along, being polite with one another as an expression of tolerance. It is more. We need to name what separates us and actively seek greater understanding and healing of our own hearts. When we make progress in true dialogue, the other is not my competitor but I am led to see the other as a gift to me as I am a gift to the other. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can bring about this victory of communion which we on our own skills cannot deliver.

Whatever you do to the least, you do it to me, says Jesus (Matthew 25:40). We grow in unity as we serve the needy together. It is a great sign when our collaboration in “associating with those who are lowly” enables victories to happen on behalf of suffering humanity.

Our gathering takes place at a time when our entire country recognizes the memory of this great American: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King., Jr. In April 1963 when Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King was in jail in Birmingham, Alabama afflicted by violent racism, he was also confronted by the fact that his own fellow pastors were not in full solidarity with him. Let me quote you a text of his letter to them:

“I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco Roman world, so am I compelled to

carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid. Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an, inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds."

His leadership is truly magnanimous. And his prophetic preaching challenges us deeply even today. He moves us from small concerns to large concerns. He understands we are the body of Christ and that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." We are in a "network of mutuality" we are "tied in a single garment of destiny."

We are blessed that we are here together hoping against hope and joining hands in the struggle for greater justice for all, motivated by the love of Christ and in the unity of the Trinity One God: "God is one. One also is the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all." Lift high the Cross. "O Crux spes nostra," the early Christians said often: Oh Cross our hope!