

**Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estevez for the
Ecumenical Vespers Service
Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine
January 23, 2014**

How wonderful it is, how pleasant it is for God's people to live together in harmony. (133, 1)

Today the words of the Psalmist are made real in this historic Cathedral of St. Augustine. The Bishop of Hippo said that your desire is your prayers. Tonight we desire harmony rather than divisions, we desire collaboration, rather than competition, and we desire mutuality rather than distance and separation.

Is Christ divided? St. Paul asked of the Corinthians and through them Paul asks us the same question today.

St. Paul founded the Christian community in Corinth but now sees it wounded by all sorts of fractures, yet he recognizes first that in spite of the divisions, they have been sanctified, and called to be saints, and that they are gifted with God's grace and peace.

As always Paul gives thanks for all blessings God has enriched the community with blessings of charisms and particular gifts in the caring of others. In all modesty, Paul recognized how the Lord had blessed his shepherding them for one year and a half...yet Paul now feels the pain of knowing that this gifted community is not of one in mind and one heart as Christ the Lord would wish them to be.

A minister serves the community to form Christ in them. Paul realizes that this is not happening in Corinth, where one group follows Paul, another self-righteously Christ, another Apollo's, another Cephas making the leaders celebrities rather than humble servants of the vineyard of the Lord. The great temptation of the Church of God in Corinth was that Christ was not recognized as the only head of the Church.

So Paul sincerely exclaims, is Christ divided? As if the Lord would be a cafeteria where people choose and set aside according to their wishes.

For Paul, there is only one Lord who is the Christos – the Messiah and Lord. The Lord is the same one who was crucified on Good Friday, with whom one is in communion in virtue of baptism. The Messiah's cross is in itself the most convincing attraction to draw people to the faith far more than the preacher's clever perspective or his wisdom and experience.

Paul would be delighted listening to the hymn, *This is the Feast of Victory for our God:* Blessing, honor, glory, insight be to God and the lamb forever.

As Dr. Timothy Dean at Stamford University says in a sermon entitled, *The Church of the Undivided Christ: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? The answer to all these questions is a resounding no! Jesus Christ is indivisible.*

His atoning sacrifice alone procures our justification and right standing before God. We are baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the one God we know and worship through his self-revelation in Jesus Christ. We belong to the Church of the Undivided Christ, and we pray for that day when we can all worship together that Christ of the undivided church.”

Today when we worship together with one mind abiding in the truth and one heart attuned to the heart of Christ – we are truly honoring Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who prayed in John 17, 21 to the Father that all his disciples be one; “that they may be one Father just as you are in me and I am in you may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”