

## **CTK Mission Principle #13: Ecumenism**

**We the people of Christ the King Catholic Church are called by God our Father to be surrendered to the Lord Jesus, in the power of His Holy Spirit, in the heart of His Church.**

### **Ecumenism**

We commit to the Church's vision for ecumenism, since “the attainment of union is the concern of the whole Church, faithful and shepherds alike... This concern itself reveals already to some extent the bond of brotherhood between all Christians and it helps toward that full and perfect unity which God in His kindness wills.”

(Vatican Council II, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, #5)

In the book of the prophet Isaiah we hear this wonderful description of the time of restoration: “The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song. The glory of Lebanon will be given to them, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.” (Isaiah 35:1-2). Like many of our Advent readings we are blessed with the prophetic description of what it will be like when the King of Kings comes to restore His Kingdom. We long for the day when His Presence is so manifest! But we live in the Kingdom now, and especially in this great time of evangelization it is our responsibility to make sure that we are doing all we can to display in our lives the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.

If we look around we see a multitude of wonderful actions being taken by the followers of the Lord Jesus to build the Kingdom, not the least of which is the amazing ministry of our Holy Father, Pope Francis. Evangelization, service to the poor, there are many, many ways in which the Light of Christ is shining brightly on the face of His Bride. But there is one notable exception, and it directly impacts the ability of the People of God to proclaim the Gospel. This exception is the scandal of a divided Christianity. This directly contravenes the most profound call for unity, the one issued by the Lord Jesus Himself in His great priestly prayer in the Gospel of John: “May they all be one, just as, Father, You are in Me and I am in You, so that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe it was You Who sent Me.” (John 17:21) The King of Kings makes the essential connection between the unity of His People and the believability of the Gospel. The scandal of 32,000 plus different Christian denominations does not assist the efforts to evangelize the world.

This difficulty was very much on the heart of Blessed Pope John XXIII when he convoked the Second Vatican Council. One of the four reasons he gave for calling the Council was: “to foster unity among Christians.” This is not only a superlative good in itself, but is necessary in order to fulfill the fourth reason he gave for calling the Council: “to call all mankind into the Church.”

The Fathers of the Council shared deeply in the Holy Father's aspirations to work for the unity of all the followers of the Lord Jesus. The fruit of their labor was *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the *Decree on Ecumenism*. As the citation above from this document points out, the attainment of the union of all the followers of the Lord Jesus is not just the purview of the Bishops but is the responsibility of all the faithful. That being the case, it is clearly necessary that all of the faithful be well-catechized concerning the Church's approach to this crucial area. To that end, not only reading, but being very familiar with the content of the *Decree on Ecumenism* is clearly essential, especially given some of the unique elements of our local situation, where we are blessed with such a richness of sharing our lives with Orthodox, Protestant, and Messianic Jewish brothers and sisters. Familiarity with the Decree on Ecumenism should be a goal of all the adult members of Christ the King.

We see how this document echoes the heart of Blessed Pope John XXIII: "The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only." In its introductory paragraph the Council Fathers address the division and its consequences: "Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature." (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, #1)

What can we do? One of the very significant features of this document is the approach it takes to Christians not in full communion with the Church. The focus in so many other venues has been on what divides us—who believes what, who did what, who's to blame, etc. etc. But the Council Fathers took a different approach. Their statement on the relationship between Catholics and other Christians is key: "all who have been justified by faith in Baptism are members of Christ's body...and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church." (#3).

There is an old slogan, 'you can choose your friends but not your family.' The bottom line is that if they are baptized, they are family, period. Everything that the New Testament teaches about the appropriate respect, support, and especially love, that every follower of the Lord Jesus should have for every other follower of the Lord Jesus applies here. Sadly, one could never tell that from our history, but nonetheless it is true and today, when all Christians face even greater challenges to living out their faith, it is absolutely crucial that this essential family tie be recognized and maintained. It is the key dimension in the Church's approach to ecumenism. Our unity as family is the heart of the King's prayer for His Body. Let us obey.

#### Reflection Questions:

For the individual: What can I do to better serve the cause of ecumenism?

For the family: How can we as a family serve the cause of ecumenism more effectively?

For the parish: How can we as a parish be more effective in our support of ecumenism?