

BULLETIN – JANUARY 15

A week of unity. This third week of January, we have a wonderful opportunity to ponder the call we have, both from our Creator and from the need for public order, to work for unity among peoples. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday each have their own particular themes and events which can help us reflect and act on these worthy goals.

Monday, January 16, we celebrate the Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday. The turmoil of the last few years and the rise of movements like Black Lives Matter with their regurgitated '60's slogans give many young people the impression that absolutely no progress has been made in racial justice and harmony in our society since the arrival of the slave ships from Africa three and four hundred years ago. It would help them and all of us to review some documentary history of our country to see where we've been and get a better read on where we are.

One hundred years ago, President Woodrow Wilson, an unabashed racist and eugenicist, arranged to have the tragically inaccurate D.W. Griffith film *Birth of a Nation* shown at the White House, the first American motion picture so honored. I say "tragically" because the film was significant in the reconstitution of the Ku Klux Klan and the beginning of the wave of lynchings which terrorized the South for decades.

We came through those events and through the heroism of the Tuskegee Airmen and sports figures like Jesse Owens, Jackie Robinson, and Larry Doby to the mid-'50's and the great advances and bloody setbacks of the civil rights era. Among the latter, the assassination of Dr. King himself in 1968 was a terrible and sad turning point. Those who had joined him in peaceful protest had lost their standard bearer. Those who had pressed for more violent means pointed to his death as proof that only violence could bring about the desired result, if they were even able to decide on one.

Succeeding decades have brought both marvelous opportunities and insulting degradations to the African American community. Social progress such as voting rights and economic safety nets emanated from both the well intentioned who were seeking justice and the cynical who were just out for votes. The Great Society announced by President Lyndon Johnson tried to lift people out of poverty while neglecting the critical element of the integrity of the family. The sad result has been the creation of a permanently dependent underclass and a skyrocketing spiritual poverty among people of all races. How those problems can be addressed and solved is as vexing a question as how to finally eradicate the horrible legacies of slavery.

Even many who did not vote for the first President of African and American origins heard his promise of hope and change, and supposed that he would at least be in a position to do much to heal ancient wounds and encourage unity among citizens of all backgrounds. Many have been bitterly disappointed to hear him respond heatedly in moments of crisis more as community-organizer-in-chief than as one seeking some degree of executive objectivity and urging others to do the same. Many of all races fear that such moments presented opportunities, teaching moments, that were squandered and lost in the interest of petulant partisan politics.

Much to pray for, much to work for, together, to help make Dr. King's wonderful Dream, so beautifully expressed in his famous speech of August 28, 1963, come true. How we need statesmen of his dignity and stature again! How we need shepherds, pastors, of his courage again!

Wednesday, January 18, is the first day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Father Paul Wattson, a Graymoor Friar and convert from Anglicanism, established the Octave of Christian Unity in 1908, situating it to begin with the traditional feast of the Chair of St. Peter and ending with the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul on January 25. Over these 110 years, the Week of Prayer has gradually been adopted by more and more Christians as a response to the wish and hope of Christ himself, expressed in his priestly prayer for his disciples at the Last Supper, recorded in St. John's chapters 14-17, "that they all may be one" (John 17:21).

Some in this age of pretended inclusion have hailed the Protestant Reformation as an important expression of "diversity." You know, "we can all have different approaches, different beliefs, because we're all headed to the same place." No, we're not. If I'm on Leonard Street, and you're on Covell, and neither of us changes course, we will perhaps intersect at one point, but we will never arrive at the same place. Truth allows for a variety of points of view, but there is still only one truth. Christ invited his disciples to the Eucharistic banquet, not to a buffet or a cafeteria line where they could pick and choose. If Christ is lying about even one thing, he's a liar and can't be trusted about anything.

The fact is, the Catholic Church already has within itself a huge variety of ritual churches (Byzantine, Maronite, Roman, etc.) which allow for *diversity* and a variety of expression, ranging from the legal to the poetic. *Division*, however, is not only a contrary sign and a contrary witness to the truth of the Gospel of Christ; it sets us up for a spirit of *competition*, which is completely unbecoming among the followers of the One who prayed for unity. The Apostle shows us the sole type of competition that is legitimate for the Christian: "Love one another with mutual affection; *anticipate one another in showing honor*" (Romans 12:10). This is why we do not and must not gloat when we receive into full communion those who are joining us from another Christian church community. We rejoice in sharing all the possibilities of the fullness of Christ's truth, and we give thanks to God for the preparation that our friends who are becoming Catholic have already received in their former church home.

Friday, January 20, is the inauguration of our new President and the beginning of a new administration. Whether we are aghast at his bombast, frightened or confused by his campaign promises, or cautiously optimistic about his apparent philosophical leanings, it is clear that he does not intend to continue "business as usual." Anyone who pledges to drain a swamp, even on a tract of land, had better be wary of what can potentially be exposed, both good and bad. We can expect that many will fulfill their pledges to be contentious at every turn. We must also recognize that the need to strive for unity is based not on varieties of personality or philosophy, but on the need to live together civilly, to provide for those who require provision, and to exercise civic virtue and charity even in debate over the most weighty issues.

We have many others who depend on us to conduct ourselves thoughtfully and appropriately. How can we expect our young people to show respect for their elders or for authority if we are crude and vulgar in our references to even non-exemplary public figures? How can we hope for a spirit of open-mindedness and learning when our own smug arrogance allows no room even for nuance? The Church urges all of us to remember to pray fervently for those in public office. We help to make history every day of our lives. As St. Paul says, "Let us live honorably, as in the daylight" (Romans 13:13),

not just so that we won't get caught, but because it is the godly thing to do. Then, no matter what kind of leaders we may prove to have, we can still be considered a just and virtuous people because of the regard we manifest both for ourselves and for all those around us. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: “Stop judging, and you will not be judged,” said Jesus (Luke 6:37). On a practical note, stop judging and you'll enjoy life a lot more. And so will those around you.