

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Our status quo is division.

We sort people on a daily basis—

labeling and categorizing them so that we know what to do with them.

We divide people up by race or skin color,

by what kind of car they drive or which neighborhood they live in,
or by what school they attend.

We classify people based on how they talk, their accent and vocabulary—

and we judge them accordingly.

We divide people up based on whether they're gay or straight or just confused.

We look at their weight, their eating habits, their smells, and their clothing.

Everyone gets fitted nicely into his category. He's labeled.

Some we like, others we avoid.

But the greater problem isn't the value we place on each category,

but the fact that these categories exist.

In a world that has a way of dividing people up,

our Lord Jesus comes to make us one.

From God's perspective—rather than seeing all sorts of categories,

like religion and race, political party or sexual persuasion—

God simply sees one category: *sinners*.

Each and every man, woman, and child.

Every infant and every sweet grandma—

all are guilty, and fallen short of the kingdom of God.

All have lived contrary to His good and perfect will.

All have set up their own gods and lords according to their desire.

All are in rebellion, at enmity with God.

God doesn't see the factions and the parties and those making progress and those not even trying.

He simply sees a guilty humanity, alike under the weight of their sin.

What He sees is a common fear, and the terror of the demons and the darkness.

Though this fear certainly expresses itself differently among the various people—

sometimes through a pompous, false sense of pride,

other times through the overwhelming sense of despair—

in either case, He sees slaves, those captive to their guilty consciences.

All alike are under sin.

And there aren't some over here that belong to Him and others, there, that belong to a rival.
The whole world is His, for He made it.

But our sin has blinded us from this Lord.

The oneness we're to see appears splintered and shattered—

and we go our lives seeing only races and colors and denominations and competition.

We're bound to our hate and our anger,

our pride and boasting.

We divide one another up and rank each according to ourselves:

some are wiser, smarter, better looking, thinner, more assertive and successful;

others are slower, uglier, dumber, lower, and worse.

Throughout all these categories and divisions—*we* are the standard.

That's our world.

And scarier yet, that's our heart and our mind—that's who *we* are.

And it's into this world, this people, this heart and mind—

it's unto *you* that Christ is born!

He enters this world, and comes to you in particular, not to divide you up into categories,

but to bring unity and peace and wholeness and life to this sin-ridden world.

Sin rules the divisions of this world and the categories of our hearts.

Therefore God has come in Christ to forgive the sin of the world.

That's the Kingdom of Heaven—where forgiveness reigns.

And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation!

That's why Christ came:

to end our accusations and divisions and pride and jealousy and self-glory,

and to unite us together as one people, with one voice, to give glory to God alone.

This hope of unity and peace has long been promised by the Scriptures.

That all mankind—Jews *and* Gentiles—might be one in Christ.

And just so we're clear:

Gentiles glorifying God was as startling as us hearing that the perverted and the homeless,
the clingy and the annoying, the self-loathing and the arrogant are also to give Him glory!

Gentiles were the Philistines and the Edomites,

the Romans and the Greeks, the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

They murdered the Israelites, destroyed their temples, and mocked their God.

Even still, the promise includes the Gentiles,

because God sees no categories, no classes, no divisions.

None is excluded; all are welcome in Christ.

St. Paul reminds us of that brilliant passage from Isaiah,

*“The root of Jesse will come,
even He who arises to rule the Gentiles;
in Him will the Gentiles hope.”* (Rom 15:12; Isa 11:10)

The Gentile’s hope is the same as the Israelite’s:
that the divisions and categories would cease, and the sin of the world be forgiven.

And in Christ that hope becomes reality—the promise sees fulfillment—sins are forgiven in Him.
We know the Lord’s kingdom by the word of sins forgiven:
at the Baptismal font, where sinners are washed with the word;
at the pulpit where the Gospel is proclaimed to all;
and at the Altar, where His Body and Blood works the forgiveness of sins even today.

Wherever Jesus is with His forgiveness, there also is His Kingdom.

And that’s why, every Advent, we go out to the Jordan with John,
“[who] *came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,
‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’*” (Mt 3:1-2)

And that’s why we’re here today also:
because Jesus is here with His kingdom, destroying the categories of our sinful flesh,
and creating a unity of peace and hope.

Here, like at the Jordan, we confess our sins, admitting our divisions and beg for His mercy.
And it’s here that mercy is given, hope restored, and the promise fulfilled.
Here, in this Church, we confess that we are One in Christ because here, sins are forgiven.

This unity that we have with God in Christ is also a oneness that we’re to have with each other.
St. Paul says,

*“May the God of endurance and encouragement
grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,
that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”*
(Rom 15:5-7)

Our harmony with one another comes only in Christ—
only in His kingdom of forgiveness,
only as we recognize one another as the Baptized of God.

And because you are the baptized, sinners forgiven by the blood of the Lamb,
then let us also welcome one another for the Glory of God.

*“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in this hope.”* (Rom 15:13)
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