

‘THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE’

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UT Omnes Unum Sint.’ Why was it that our Lord did not include this prayer among the petitions of the Our Father? Surely it was because its content is too holy and its meaning too delicate and full of mystery. This petition could only be presented to the Father with the required purity and value by the lips of our High Priest, the God-Man, and by the infinite love of his heart.

Ut omnes unum sint. The prophetic eye of Jesus scans time and eternity. The faithful appear before him in their millions—men of the most diverse tongues and lands approach him, desirous to find in him deliverance and eternal salvation, love and peace, eager to live according to his will and example, to be like him in all things, forming a host of glittering stars. Each one in himself, separated from the rest, is a world of his own. But this was not enough. In God’s plan they are to be one, to be one in a far greater degree, to grow together as members into one Body, into the one Christ, into the Total Christ.

Why did our Lord not choose these words as the starting point of his sermons, and why is it only just at the moment of farewell that, with surprise, the disciples hear it from his lips? There had been too many obstacles in the ideas and thoughts of these men; these needed to be removed, transformed and replaced by new divine ideas. The disciples had to be prepared gradually for a right appreciation by an education extending over years. But now our Lord is speaking openly and no longer in parables. Now we see the accomplishment of the sacred mysteries, on which alone unity is to be established, from which unity is to spring. From this moment these mysteries begin to exert their power of transformation in the individual and in the entire world. The little band of the Apostles will disperse soon after the departure of their Lord and the disciples will be scattered over the face of the earth.

Ut omnes unum sint. With this prayer the Redeemer, at his departure, is imploring completion and preservation of his life’s work; is imploring it now after the son of perdition had effected

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the first rent in the close circle of the Apostles and had stepped irretrievably into the darkness of the night. Is the Master to see the crumbling, the breaking up begin under his very eyes, at his table, at his agape? Our Lord is praying for a glorious prolongation in his immaculate mystical Body. We may think of the Father . . . as having reserved to himself the adorning of the Church with this all-embracing, strengthening unity, just as he reserved to himself the decision as to those who should sit on his right hand and on his left. . . . If this is really so, then this unity is a gift, a quite incomparable gift, which even the Son as man may beg of the Father only in humility. Then, too, this unity appears as a blessing, which the Father's wisdom, power and mercy alone are capable of realising; it is a blessing which we humans, with confidence in Christ's prayer, can never strive after and implore too much.

The incarnate Son of God once gave his precious blood and laid down his life for his Church to make all men blessed; it is also his will that all men should find their way into the Church, that in her and through her all should receive the graces of the Redemption. Because of this he founded the Church as the *one* all-embracing ark of salvation. Because of this it must remain for all time, one of the greatest intentions of the Redeemer and of his disciples, that no member of this community should be lost; that all men should live in the unity of this Church, in one faith and one love, participating in the one eucharistic Victim; and that they be led towards their common eternal vocation and perfection. We remember the tears shed by our Lord over the obstinacy of the holy city, which refused to let its children be gathered together (Matt. 23, 27). After all, that gathering together did but correspond to the primordial mission of the chosen people and to the prayer of the psalmist in his cry: *Congrega nos de nationibus* (Ps. 105, 47), and correspond above all to the redeeming love of Christ. The very same burning desire is apparent in Christ's words: He who does not gather with me scatters (Luke 11, 23). He surrenders his life completely, as a victim, not for a particular class of privileged devotees and saints, but for his people as a whole, as a unity: '*moriturus erat pro GENTE*'. And this is not all. In that very same desire and love he wills to gather all the children of God, scattered as they are among all peoples and in all lands, into *one* community, into *one* house of God, into *one* divine family (John 11, 51 ff.)

Admittedly his enemies are stricken with horror at this project, and seek from the very beginning to prevent any piercing of their narrow horizon. They seek to bring to nought, to destroy all higher and wider values at their centre, in their root, in their crown, in the God-Man. Surely never did divine thoughts and human thoughts, divine love and human hate, stand in such irreconcilable contrast as here. Truly it is a terrible contrast. God's creative and redemptive will sees everything in one, ordains everything towards one, sanctifies all in one, leads all into one. God's enemies on the contrary seek to hinder precisely that. With the death of Christ they hope once and for all to render ineffective this divine will for unity—it is remarkable that they too are working for an involuntary, fateful unity: if one man die *for the whole people*.

All this is a sign for us that when we touch upon the unity of the Church we attain the most holy, most divine, and most essential, thing that Christ left to his Bride. But it is in the sacerdotal prayer of our Lord that God's design and will for the one-ing of the redeemed appears most magnificently. . . . The Son may bear witness before the Father that he had glorified the Father's name, that he had made known the Father's name to men, that he had raised them thereby to divine sonship. The work the Father had laid upon him is thus consummated. What can remain then that he should beg of the Father in the last moments before his departure? Not that he should take them out of the world, not that he should remain visibly near them. They are to remain in a world which had recognised neither the Father nor the Son, which is incapable of receiving the Spirit of God. And now, pleading for a last and highest grace for these disciples, he turns in this most solemn hour with uplifted eyes to the Father, and from the inmost fire of his heart there breaks forth this prayer: *Ut unum sint*. And he reiterates solemnly: Holy Father, keep them, whom thou hast given me, in thy name, *that they may be one as we are one*.

If we except the prayer on Mount Olivet, the prayer of Christ sorrowful unto death, there is no other prayer of our Lord's which reveals greater ardour, no other gives us a deeper glimpse into the most hidden recesses of his heart. It is not only for those who have followed at his side for years now, but also for those countless souls who are to believe their words that he is praying: Holy Father, be they thousands and millions yet *let them all be one*.

One: this is to be not only in name or in witness, not only in their eternal destiny and faith. The nature and meaning, the cause and measure of this unity, destined for the disciples and indispensable for them, are something so new and unheard of that they cannot be compared to anything here below. Only in the inner life of the triune God is a symbol to be found. Hence the repetition leading to the climax: *Father, that they may be one, as thou art in me, and I in thee.* That they may be one, not simply in belief in certain ideas and principles, not in the servitude of created necessity, nor as a result of any human agreement. That they may be one in the triune God, as thou and I are one, that the world may come to believe that the Father has sent the Son. With increasing emphasis and with deeper foundation the prayer is repeated a third time. The glory he had received from the Father the Son has given to us men. To what end has he done this? Is it to make kings of us, to clothe us with his dignity? Certainly: but the primary motive is something far higher. The Church and redeemed humanity must want for nothing in the task of reproducing the divine unity. That is the deepest reason for the prayer. Just as, and because, the Father and the Son are one, Christ's disciples also must be one so that their oneness grow into that perfection, with which, in which and through which they may be supremely one. Then will the world, which is separated from God, acknowledge of itself, that it is the Father who has sent Christ, and that the Father loves us men as he loved his Son.

What can make us better appreciate the necessity and value of our unity and the misfortune of every separation than this prayer of Christ? There is in fact a divine necessity at the basis of our unity. In it a divine perfection is to be reproduced and made active. Here lies the chief reason for acknowledging Christ's work and life, even his divinity and his mission from the Father. The unbounded love with which the Father blesses him and us becomes tangible. In her very unity the Church possesses much that is heavenly and divine, and this serves to show the treasures that are lost to those who culpably wrench themselves from this unity or will to remain far from it.

There can be no doubt that a divine mystery lies hidden here. For that unity which our Lord so intimately and so urgently desired is not immediately assured or realised by the overwhelming truth and clarity of his teaching, nor by the countless incontestable

miracles, nor by his express command: Love one another; not even through Baptism and the Eucharist, no, not even through the sacrament of unity or the eucharistic sacrifice. This unity demands that our Lord intercede with his heavenly Father in oft-repeated prayer, as for a particular gift and grace. For, to be one, it simply does not suffice that all should walk under the same cloud, that all should drink of the one rock. It does not even suffice that in the waters of baptism all should be lowered into the same death of Christ, should be buried with the Crucified, should be awakened to new life with the risen Christ. Even—and this is almost incomprehensible—it is not enough that all should eat of the same bread of life, and drink of the same blood of reconciliation, at the one table of the Lord. Christ's blood was powerful enough to bring heaven and earth together and reconcile them. But it seems incomparably more difficult to unite the hearts of men in love and concord and to preserve them in one spirit, to effect their growing together into one mystical body and one unity. The final prayer of our Lord at the moment of his departure was needed to bridge the abyss which must be overcome, to surmount our daily recurring interior and exterior differences and oppositions; the special grace of the eternal Father was needed, so that in this unity the crowning of the life and death of his Son might be achieved, that the unmistakable messianic note might be imprinted on his work.

That prayer of our Lord is, however, not only a precious pledge and legacy to his Church, it is also an example for all men and all time. It is a pressing exhortation unceasingly to unite our prayer with the sacerdotal prayer of Christ, that the Father may preserve his sons in unity, and perfect them in unity. It is not by chance that the first eucharistic prayer is for the most part a prayer for the unity of those whom the Father has given and is still to give to the Son. May we let no sacrifice pass without making this high-priestly intention our own. In it is expressed the whole life and work of Christ. In it is revealed the most profound meaning of the Eucharist and of the sacrificial death of Christ. Let us never weary of storming the heavenly Father with our Church, that in truth and for ever he may lead us in peace, keep us in peace and perfect us in peace. Let us pray at the same time for those to whom the privilege of belonging to the one visible Church is still withheld. Let us pray that in their conversion and homecoming the last wish of Christ's Sacred Heart be accomplished. . . .