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When asked by the Pharisees which was the greatest commandment, Jesus answered with two related ones: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind," and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," (Mt 22: 37, 39)<sup>1</sup>. Failing to uphold either of these two commandments is the apostasy that Ezekiel talks about leading to the dispersion of believers. When Christian communities fail to come together and fulfill both of these commandments they will not be one in God's hand.

The lack of Christian unity is weakening the Catholic Church's witness to the gospel. We are failing in our duty to fully follow both the commandments Jesus calls the greatest. Our emphasis on the Eucharistic elements that leads us to exclude those who are from different faith traditions from full participation in our Eucharistic celebrations violates the commandment of love of neighbor. Some may argue that it is out of reverence for the true presence of Christ in the sacrament that leads to this practice in the Catholic Church, and therefore we are following the first commandment Jesus names. At first this seems right, but the truth is the first commandment is only partially upheld in this emphasis on Christ's presence in the Eucharistic elements.

To love the Lord requires the Christian to love the triune God, not just the Christ who is present in the Eucharistic elements. Love of the Triune God requires a love of neighbor. In some cases the emphasis on the Christ-centered Eucharistic elements even brings about the exclusion of fellow Catholics from full participation in the Eucharistic celebration. I have had to attempt to alleviate the pain many young adults feel due to the fact that their divorced and remarried parents are not allowed to share in communion with them at the celebration of the Eucharist. I do not see a change in current Eucharistic practice coming any time soon. The reality of the present situation is that we cannot look to Eucharist as a means of bringing about Christian unity.

In response to this situation I like to turn to Luke's account of the appearance of Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Two disciples are traveling to Emmaus—they are going away from the community of the disciples in Jerusalem after the death and burial of Jesus. As they journey they encounter but do not recognize Jesus. He asks what they are conversing about as they walk. Downcast, they explain that the one whom they were following and hoping to be the Messiah was recently crucified. In response, Jesus shares the scriptures with them. They are the ones who invite Jesus to the meal during which he is revealed to them in the breaking of the bread. Scripture is first. After this encounter, the two disciples that had left the group returned to Jerusalem and gave a new account of Jesus to those that were gathered together in the upper room. Many have focused on the breaking of the bread in this story. Note that as an action performed by Christ it brings about the opening of the disciples' eyes; it is, however, the dialogue with Christ concerning scripture that causes their hearts to burn.

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<sup>1</sup> All bible passages are taken from The New American Bible.

As Catholics we are members of a sacramental church. The actions that the priest does *in persona Christi* are important to us. I do not wish to lessen this importance or the meaning of these actions. That is why I do not think we should look to the sacraments, especially Eucharist, as a means of bringing about unity amongst Christian denominations. Each denomination has their own rituals that give meaning and depth to their faith lives. We all share a common book and many of the denominations share in the tradition of praying the Liturgy of Hours.

This story and shared history leads me to believe that the method of reviving Christian unity should start with scripture. We should share in our common stories. I would like to see a renewal of the Liturgy of the Hours in parishes and faith communities. In looking at my own Benedictine tradition, the Rule of St. Benedict states “We believe that the divine presence is everywhere and that in every place the eyes of the Lord are watching the good and the wicked. Be beyond the least doubt we should believe this to be especially true when we celebrate the divine office,” (RB 19: 1-2)<sup>2</sup>. The divine presence, the whole triune God is present in the praise that occurs in the divine office. Many people will see this as a reference to when Christ speaks of where two or three are gathered together in his name He will be in their midst (conf. Mt. 18:20), but many forget that it is more than just Christ being present. In the previous verse Christ assures us that it is the Father who grants prayers of the faithful gathered together. The Liturgy of the Hours can lead to a meeting with the Triune God for all who are present.

Christian unity can be initiated with regular morning and evening prayer services that are open to all. An ecumenical office book could be developed that would include hymns of all traditions, psalms, and readings taken from scripture, the church fathers, lives of the saints, and modern theologians. Christians of all denominations are already in the practice of finding community in shared work experience, in the case of volunteer work there is typically an added dimension of service that may or not originate from a Christian concern. Our religious institutions should provide the opportunity for people to find community in prayer as well. If a common office is developed, a Roman Catholic would be able to attend Morning Prayer in a Lutheran assembly, and an Episcopalian would feel at home attending Evening Prayer in a Catholic Church.

Coming together to communally praise God would be a way of fulfilling both of the commandments with which Jesus charges us. Both would be one in God’s hand. In focusing on the shared scriptural heritage of all Christian denominations, we would prevent our differences in ritual from dividing us in our times of prayer. When gathered together to praise the Lord, divisions of ritual thought should not be allowed to break the living Body of Christ.

Ezekiel ends his prophecy of the two sticks with God declaring, “My dwelling shall be with them; I will be their God, and they shall be my people,” (Ezek. 37: 27). It is not the dwelling place that God speaks about but rather his dwelling. God will live with us. This is possible to all when prompted by our love of God we are able to come together in praise.

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<sup>2</sup> *RB1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*. Ed. Timothy Fry, O.S.B. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press.