

**The Diocese of the South**  
**PO Box 191109**  
**Dallas, TX 75219-191109**

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Voice (214) 522-4149

Fax (214) 526-7170

**2007 Archpastoral Message**  
**The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ**

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

*“For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us. Having abolished in his flesh the enmity even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God...” (Ephesians 2).*

The preceding scriptural passage is read on the 24th Sunday after Pentecost (this year November 11th, the Sunday prior to the beginning of the Nativity Fast). St. Paul is describing a most significant aspect of the Incarnation. The enmity between nations and people of differing races, taken for granted as something natural and actually sanctioned by “religion,” was destroyed by the Incarnation, the entrance of God Himself into time, into human history.

The Incarnation is the great turning point of history. Even the secular world marks its time “Before Christ” (BC) and “Anno Domini” (AD -- the year of our Lord). Time, since Christ, is the modern era. Twentieth-century man likes to think of his century as the truly modern one, and of deep concerns for equality and justice as being products of his time. Yet, all that is said now about these concepts was said many centuries ago by Jesus Christ Himself, and society is only beginning to catch up with His “advanced ideas.”

Racial equality, brotherhood among nations and peoples, integration -- these are ideas that one hears expressed continually in our day, and many, even some Christians, regard them as foreign to the teachings of the Church. The fact is that Christians themselves have obscured and distorted the fundamental characteristics of the new life that God Incarnate gave to the world.

Religion has been, historically, the sanctifier of national differences. The “Faith” often has coincided with the boundaries of the nation, and unfortunately, Christian communities have been strongholds of ethno-religiosity-national faith ideas.

One radical misunderstanding of Christians of their own faith is partially responsible for this attitude. Christianity is often thought of as one of so many “religions,” when the truth is that Christianity is not religion in the usual sense of the word. It is above religion; Christ came to complete and crown religion. It is the new life in Christ, the worship of God in spirit and in truth.

Unaided by direct revelation, man's relationship to God found its expression in "religion," yet, when the fullness of time was come, and God entered into the world, the real nature of that relationship was revealed. This revealed relationship, then, is "super-religion," above and beyond all pietistic systems devised by man, the end toward which all religion was directed.

However, throughout Christian history there have been those who would force Christianity into the mold of traditional religion and make of it one more competitor for men's loyalties. Even in our own Church, by historical accident, the Faith has been identified with nationalities. It is particularly sad that Christians have not taken the initiative and, being true to their nature, broken down the walls of partition. It is tragic that Christians have identified themselves with the old idea of religion as the separator of mankind. Due in part, to this misunderstanding, a large-scale abandonment of the Church was seen in years past, and is evident even to this day.

In reality, faith in Christ is the force of unification and could solve the world's problems; all those things which captivate men's minds in our day -- peace, brotherhood, equality, social justice -- have their origin in the teachings of Jesus Christ. The Church has always prayed for the union of all men in the Liturgy, because she is convinced that God so wills it. Tragically, when men speak now of peace, brotherhood, equality and social justice, they offer humanism as the only basis for these ideals.

The unity and peace of which St. Paul spoke are unity and peace that only Christ can give, and this is exactly what faith in Christ leads to. Unity and peace on any other foundation only leads to further chaos and wider gulfs of separation.

We Christians must re-examine ourselves and allow ourselves to be unified, indeed reconciled to one another in Christ. We can start by removing, with God's help, all enmity and ill-will that exists among ourselves; we must consciously make ours the following characteristic measures by which we can judge just how close we are to Christ -- "do unto others as we would have them do unto us," "forgive men their debts, just as our heavenly Father forgives us our debts." No matter how chaotic the world may be, no matter how much hatred and bitterness that exists among men, we know that when men take seriously Christ's command to "love our neighbor as ourselves," the influence and effect of that love is so great that it can again overcome the world.

With love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Dmitri". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**+DMITRI**

Archbishop of Dallas and the South