

# Important Enough to Argue About

## 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

1 Cor 1.10–17

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God, amen.

We hear today from St Paul—let there be no divisions among you, but be perfectly joined together in one mind and judgment

The world we live in is full of divisions...there are thousands of denominations of Christianity—of ways that we understand who Jesus is and what He has done for us

And in many ways there are a lot of similarities but there are differences too and as I have spoken about before those differences can really matter

I have used the example of having two small white pills—one of arsenic (poison) and the other aspirin—well in this case you want to know which is which. In other words, the difference is life and death in this case

So with the similarities we should try to build on those for sure but we have to acknowledge that differences exist and this is what St Paul is talking about today

One of the things that we think is bad sometimes is arguing—we don't want to get into arguments and we might ask why would you want to argue?

Well, my question today is actually why wouldn't you want to argue?

Because, when you argue it means the thing you are arguing about is important to both parties—its important enough to argue about

You both believe something strongly and you believe it strongly enough that you are willing to argue about it

One person wants to wash the dishes this way and the other person wants to wash the dishes that way and you argue....

That's obviously a silly example but the point remains

There are important examples though—when we hold to something that is true we need to fight for that if it is indeed true

As I mentioned there are many versions of Christianity so what does this admonition from St Paul mean for us today that there should be no division among you when it comes to our faith?

Well, when it comes to us here in the Orthodox Church we believe and know that we have truth, the fullness of the faith.

Why do we say that? Why can we say that?

Well, it is because this is the same Church that our Lord started. It has continuity all the way back to the beginning and we are connected to this. It is the same faith professed by the apostles

Certainly there have been arguments and disagreements but it is the same faith from now back to Christ and we can rest on the that continuity.

It's not that WE ourselves have somehow now figured out the right faith and how to believe but rather that we are connected to this faith that has been handed to us and that we work to preserve. We join ourselves to something bigger than our own thoughts and opinions

This points us to something that is really prevalent and problematic in our culture today and that is that "you have your truth and I have my truth and we can just get along—it doesn't matter what anyone believes"

Well, as we can see, if you just turn on the TV for ten minutes that leads to some pretty wild things that are actually destructive to us as human beings

This individualism when it comes to truth is a great heresy of our day

Now, there is something that is very important about the individual experiences that we have in life and we should never negate someone else's experience—what they feel, what they've

been through

We should never push those things aside

But what we should do is affirm the experience of each person, including ourselves and then join ourselves to something that is bigger than both of us to measure and gauge our own experiences

And what we join ourselves to is the Church, which is the body of Christ and we reconcile ourselves to Christ who is the truth. Our Lord says, I am the way the truth and the life. So we unite ourselves to this truth—our experiences, our feelings, our suffering

So it's not just me on my own island determining what is true not needing anyone else...this is actually an experience of hell—to cut ourselves off from others and from God. This is selfishness and this is hell.

So we have our personal experience but then we have the experience of the Church that we join ourselves to and in joining ourselves to the Church we join ourselves to Christ and to others and in this joining we will even argue about what is true and good and beautiful and lovely because we care

So how do we avoid falling into this trap of selfishness

Well, our Lord shows us the way—He is the prime example always

Arms outstretched on the cross in giving to the world

So how do we do this ourselves—follow the example of our Lord

Well, we take up our cross as our Lord did...

And how do we do that?

Well, one of the ways we do that is by accepting the circumstances that we find ourselves in?

We are here in Albany, NY with the family we have, with the friends we have, with the job we have, with the bad priest we have...

and we accept that. We accept what God has given us in our lives

just like our Lord accepted that cross

It's not a pleasant thing to accept the cross BUT when we accept it and offer it back to God

it becomes our life. It becomes the means by which we are saved

This transforms us, it is our transfiguration in Christ

So this is the first way that we do battle against this sin of selfishness to accept our circumstances and offer them back to Christ in thanksgiving

The next thing we can do is we can listen to others

Now, I just said a few minutes ago that it is ok and even maybe good to argue—yes this is good IF we are trying to come to an understanding and agreement with others

So often when we are talking with someone we are thinking about what we are going to say next while they are talking—we all do this.

But if we literally say back what the other person said, we are showing them that we are listening and this is a way that we can show love for another.

A way that we can show that we care about what they are saying and that we are giving them space to make their point

And then we can make our point and try to come to an agreement.

So when St Paul tells us today let there be no divisions among you—it's not that he's telling us to just let others be. NO we have to fight for this as weird as that may sound. We have to fight to remain in communion with each other

We accept the experiences of each person and ourselves and then we measure them against Christ who is Truth itself so we take the subjective experiences which are important and then we reconcile them to the objective which is important and we find healing this way

Let us take the admonition of St Paul then to let there be no divisions among us through accepting our circumstances in our lives and offering them back to God and then listening to others in love so that we can come to agreement. In the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit Amen.