

## FOR THE GOOD OF THE HOUSEHOLD

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### CHURCH UNITY

As we continue our Lenten journey and are about the reformation of ourselves in order to be ready for the Easter celebration of resurrection, it is important to turn our attention to sin. On the list of things to give up for Lent, sin is at the top. Of course, the first step is to recognize the sins of which we are guilty. Often, that is the most difficult hurdle. Our sins are a reflection of who we are, and it is human nature to resist any change of our identity.

I believe that one of the gravest sins that we can commit is that against the unity of the Church. The fact that the Christian Church is not one is someone's sin. If we are not working toward Christian unity (at least praying for it), it is a negligence on our part. I have been moved by our Holy Father's commitment to an ecumenical outreach. The annual ecumenical services held within our Diocese (which we have just celebrated) have been an inspiration to me. Those of you who were there will understand what I am saying.

Several weeks ago, I had the privilege of being present for the ordination of the new Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston and the installation of the new Bishop of Saginaw. They were impressive rites, with the cathedrals filled to capacity. Besides a representation from the parishes of the respective dioceses, there were cardinals and bishops (along with the Apostolic Nuncio) of other dioceses present as well. One could sense the unity of the particular Diocesan Churches, as well as the unity of the wider Church. I remember in this regard my own ordination and installation as the Bishop of this Diocesan Church almost eighteen years ago.

The Church of Saginaw has received a bishop whose leadership will be somewhat different from the bishop that left them suddenly through death. Most likely, there will be liturgical as well as ministerial changes. In speaking to several of my friends there, I got the impression that this will not be a problem for them. When the former Bishop was their diocesan pastor, they followed him. Now that the current Bishop is their shepherd, they are ready to follow him. That is as it should be, and it was refreshing to hear it said.

But, then, something happens along the way when life gets practical. Our ideas of what is proper tempt us to act as if we do not need spiritual leaders. Worse yet, we convince ourselves that we know what is best for the Church, more so than do our pastors.

While the Pope is the unifier of the Universal Church, the Bishop is that of the Diocesan Church, even as the Pastor is of the Parochial Church. We do not always agree with them. But, they are the ones who act in the name of the Christ. He is the ultimate unifier.

In this Year of the Eucharist and during this particular Season of Lent, it could be beneficial for us to examine our relationship with the Church leaders through whom God

intends to work in our lives. They are the ones that have been given us to follow in our particular time and place. As Bishop, I need to do the same concerning the decisions of those in the Holy See who speak for the Holy Father in matters that affect us in this Diocesan Church.

Receiving the one Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist is a sign of our unity with the other members of the Church, particularly the leaders who have been sent to guide us. We do not receive Holy Communion in other than Catholic Churches because we are not one with them, especially as regards leadership. The Eucharist is a sign of unity. It calls us to live out in a practical way the unity of the Church.