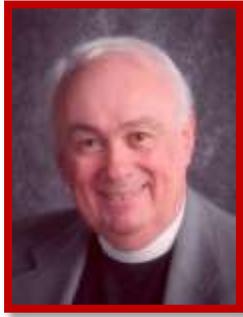


Thoughts from the Tower



I hope a number of us will join me in taking the 40 minute trip to St. Kilian's Church in Farmingdale to participate in the special service to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. It will be today (Sunday) at 4 pm. Bishop Barres will join with Bishop Lawrence Provenzano of the Episcopal Diocese and Bishop James Sudbrock of the Luthrean Synod to lead us in prayer for continuing reconciliation and renewal. A joint choir from all over Long Island will provide inspirational music, including a piece especially written for today's service.

I've written over the past few weeks about the importance of this commemoration for Catholics as well as Protestants. In an age more and more secular, when fewer people take Christ and his message seriously, it becomes all the more important for Christians to reach beyond our divisions which work against our claim to be people of love. As Jesus himself put it, as Saint John records in the 17th chapter of his Gospel, "may they all be one so that the world may believe."

Catholics and Lutherans are already much closer in belief and practice than one might suspect. Allow me to tell a story that illustrates this. When I was chaplain at Hofstra, one of my fellow Catholic campus ministers was a religious sister. She had grown up in Queens in a mixed Catholic and Jewish neighborhood with few if any Protestants. She had been to many Bat Mitzvoth for her girlfriends but had never set foot inside a Christian church other than Roman Catholic. Indeed both her family and her teachers in Catholic school had discouraged her from going into a place of false worship such as a Lutheran or Baptist church. When the Protestant chaplain at Hofstra became the pastor of the Lutheran church in Port Jefferson, Sister and I went to his installation Mass. Afterwards, she said to me, only half in jest, "Now I know why they told us kids never to go inside a Protestant church. They were afraid we'd see that exactly the same thing happens at their service as does at ours!"

Actually, there are a number of Christian denominations whose Sunday service does indeed differ in significant ways from the Catholic Mass, although we all pray to the Father through Christ and all read from the same Bible. But the Lutheran liturgy – and the Episcopal one – is basically the same. Lutherans and Episcopalians believe as we do that Christ is truly present in his risen Body and Blood in Holy Communion. We all read from the same passages of scripture appointed for the particular day. We use the same hymns. The outline of the service is the same as are the vestments and liturgical gestures. Two noticeable differences: Lutherans sing hymns with much more joy and enthusiasm than many Catholics do and almost everyone receives both the consecrated Wine and Bread.

Sadly, there are still differences that keep us from being in full communion. I'll look at them next week.

Father Donald