

On the Expression of Church Unity Locally

Twice a day in our daily Matins and Vespers we pray “for the good estate of the holy churches of God and the union of all.” Our union as Orthodox Christians is of existential consequence because as it becomes more apparent, so is our shared human nature made manifest to all. The more our common human nature is apparent to all, the less obstacle there is for everyone to understand their access to the Resurrection through Christ’s “taking on” our single human nature. This world wants us to believe that if there are 7 billion people, then there are 7 billion natures, that each person is free to follow his nature and that the principal means of fraternity is political. In the Christian vision, those 7 billion persons each share a *single* human nature. Christ assumed this human nature and by experiencing the death that we all will experience and then bursting the bonds of Hades, *all* who similarly share that human nature can also share in His Resurrection by joining to Him. To experience this Resurrection, we must adhere to Christ, not as individuals, but together within Christ’s saving Body, the Church. If we think we are all individuals who will succeed or fail according to our resources, then we are lost before we begin; yet, this is the message of the world. Therefore, it is of existential importance to know our unity in Christ.

Christ prayed that all experience this reality: “Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are” (John 17:11). Consider how important these words are: First, it is one of only a few prayers from Christ to the Father that we receive in Scripture; it records communication between Persons in the Holy Trinity! Second, it takes place in Gethsemane the night before the Lord’s Passion, making it a kind of last testament from Christ to all those who read His words.

As followers of *the* Word, we are one to the extent that we are united to Him. This unity takes place in the inner chamber of our heart, away from sight and in stillness and silence. Yet, like all events of consequence, it resonates outside in the visible world. It is through this resonance that others become aware of the Kingdom of Heaven. To outwardly signal an inner unity is to draw those who are outside in, where Christ promises “that they may have my joy made full in themselves” (John 17:13).

Great Lent and the 50 days of Pentecost that follow PASCHA are a time where this unity is especially manifest in the Church. In this time, we are all together in repentance and joy. Liturgically, we are on the same calendar. Our prayers arise from different Altars and in different tongues, but they are the same prayers and they go to the same Lord. Therefore, this is a time for us to make manifest our unity with our brothers and sisters in other Orthodox churches. Not in a political show, but to reveal our unity that already exists through Jesus Christ. Our collective witness to Eugene is strengthened thereby.

This year we will join with our brothers and sisters at St. George Greek Orthodox Church for two shared services: 1. The Divine Liturgy on the **Sunday of Orthodoxy (March 24th)** to be hosted by St. George and 2. **The Kneeling Vespers** (with a picnic lunch) of Pentecost (**June 23rd**) to be hosted by St. John the Wonderworker. Next year, each church will host the other service. Also, starting the third week of Great Lent, our Presanctified Divine Liturgies will be scheduled so that they are at St. John’s and St. George’s on alternating **Wednesday** evenings and **Friday** mornings, thereby making it possible for the Faithful in Eugene to commune twice a week (or, at least, once). Additionally, St. John’s and St. George’s will share two pan-Orthodox Saturday Divine Liturgies with St. Anne’s and St. Martin’s of Corvallis: on the **March 30th Memorial Saturday** and **Bright Saturday (May 11th)**. We have deliberately scheduled both of these events on Saturday mornings (9:30 am) in order to make it possible for as many of the Faithful in Eugene and Corvallis as possible to come together, as our Lord prayed, as one.

Fr. Daniel
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