

**Homily for the Teammate of Christ Catholic Men's Conference
January 25, 2014**

**St. Patrick Parish
Decatur, IL**

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My dear brothers in Christ: in just over one week, millions of Americans will sit down in front of their televisions to watch one of the most popular events of the year, the Super Bowl. Millions more around the world will tune in to watch the game. Preparing for this important game involves a great amount of work, both on and off the field. One of the most crucial elements of preparation for both of the teams involved is their study of their opponents. They will attempt to identify the weaknesses of the other team in order to create a game plan that will target those areas in the hopes of being successful. Attention will also be given to what the other team does well so as to develop a strategy of defending against those threats. With a solid understanding of their opponent, each team hopes to translate that knowledge into a plan that will result in securing the prestigious Vince Lombardi Trophy as the National Football League's champion.

The ability to know and understand one's opponent applies to many other areas of life. In the business world, great amounts of resources are directed to this task in order to gain a competitive advantage in the market. In the military, the age-old maxim of "know your enemy" is a fundamental principle in both offensive and defensive planning against one's rival. This principle is no less applicable when it comes to the spiritual life. In keeping with the military imagery, we know that we are indeed in a battle with the devil, our primary enemy. If we hope to be successful in resisting his attacks on us, it is important for us to know his game plan.

A helpful resource in this regard is a recent book by Father Louis J. Cameli, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, called *The Devil You Don't Know: Recognizing and Resisting Evil in Everyday Life*. One of the items identified by Father Cameli in his book is the devil's work of division in our daily lives. In fact, the word diabolical, a word which we use to associate with the works of the devil, comes from a Greek word which means to cut, tear, or divide. The devil's work of division, then, is one of his primary tactics in his game plan against us.

This work of division can be seen at the very beginning of the Scriptures in the story of Adam and Eve. By tempting them to eat of the

forbidden fruit, the devil was successful in separating Adam and Eve from God who had commanded them to not eat the fruit. After having disobeyed God, their eyes were opened and they separated themselves from one another, hiding out of shame due to their nakedness. Their children, Cain and Abel, experienced division, a division which would result in the first act of homicide. The work of division would continue in various ways for the next several thousand years.

God, however, was not content to let the devil have the upper hand and, in the fullness of time, He sent His Son into the world to reconcile humanity to Himself. Here we find the center of the mission of Christ, to free us from our division caused by sin and unite us with Him and with one another. Before enduring His Passion, Jesus prayed to His Father “that they may be one, as we are one” (John 17:22). Unity, therefore, is an essential element of what it means to be a Christian, unity with Christ and unity with one another. We see this in the Gospel as Jesus invites the first apostles to follow Him and to be with Him. He wants them to be united to Him so that they can carry on His work of reconciliation and salvation for all mankind.

Yet, even though His Passion, death, and Resurrection brought about this restoration of unity, division would continue to plague humanity. Christ has certainly won the final victory over sin and death, but the devil has not given up his work of seeking to bring division and thus depriving people of sharing in the gift of unity with God and all of the angels and saints in Heaven. We see this in our second reading for today's Mass in which St. Paul had to confront division among the members of the Church in Corinth. He had heard reports that rivalries had arisen and that people were identifying themselves with individuals other than Christ. Such division was unhealthy for their progress as a local Church and so St. Paul was eager to restore unity among the people by reminding them that they were all to identify themselves with Christ "so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning" (1 Cor 1:17).

We too must be aware of the many ways in which division deprives us of the fullness of what Christ has won for us on the Cross. Due to the fact that we are social beings, many of our experiences of division are to be found in our relationships with others.

One particularly destructive source of division is the vice of gossip. Pope Francis has brought this issue up several times during this first year

of his pontificate. He has spoken of gossip as a weapon which threatens the human community every day; it sows envy, jealousy and power struggles. It has even caused murder. When we gossip about others, we create a wedge between ourselves and them. In addition, those who listen to our gossip often find themselves forming negative judgments about the other person, resulting in even greater division. We must be ever vigilant in the use of our speech, especially when speaking about others. One of the most effective means for this is by remaining silent when what we want to say will not build others up, but only tear them down.

Divisions resulting from actions such as gossip are in most cases the manifestation of the interior sin of pride. Pride causes us to look at ourselves as the center of the universe. Whenever we encounter somebody who does not agree with us or who we do not particularly like, we are quick to form judgments about that person. Instead of looking upon the other as a brother or sister, we see them as a threat to us and we want to distance ourselves from them. This begins in our hearts where we make the decision to be separated from them. This is the basis behind what Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount when He said that “whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment” (Matt 5:22), for already, the

anger in his heart has separated him from his brother as if he were already dead without ever committing the physical act of murder. One of the most effective means of combating pride is to thank God regularly for the blessings He has showered upon us and to also pray in thanksgiving for the gifts that He has give to others, recognizing that all gifts come from Him and that the entire Body of Christ benefits from those gifts.

As we gather together here for this Eucharist, we are invited to share in the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through our reception of Christ's Body and Blood. We pray that we might be more attentive to the areas of division in our lives and implore God's help in overcoming them. Combined with the insights that we have received throughout this day from our various speakers, may we return to our daily lives and our relationships with a renewed desire to be instruments of unity and to remove those areas which have been a source of division between ourselves and others, especially God. Let us be confident that, by remaining close to Christ and His Church, we will be given all of the resources that we need to overcome the attacks of our enemy and to share in the victory that has been won for us by our Savior, Jesus Christ.

May God give us this grace. Amen.