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TOGETHER IN CHRIST

May is a month of wondrous growth. Spring brings new life out of the long-frozen earth, an image of the power of the Resurrection we celebrate these Paschal days. The Acts of the Apostles show us early Christianity beginning as a gathering of Jews, and then expanding outward, sometimes adding thousands in one day. In Antioch the first followers of Jesus “made the message known to none but Jews....However some began to talk even to the Greeks, announcing the good news of the Lord Jesus to them....A great number of them believed and were converted to the Lord” (Acts 11:19-21). “God concerned Himself with taking from among the Gentiles a people to bear His name (14). Most Christians in Maine are linked in their lineage to that conversion of non-Jewish Gentiles.

St. Luke wants to emphasize the Holy Spirit’s work in bringing diverse segments of a population into unity. St. Paul conveys this same message in his epistles. He writes to the Romans, “May God the source of all patience and encouragement, enable you to live in perfect harmony with one another according to the spirit of Jesus Christ so that with one heart and voice you may glorify God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (15:5). How do we do that? We ask St. Paul to explain the way to carry out this injunction. His answer is short and inclusive. “Accept one another as Christ accepted you, for the glory of God” (7). He had said earlier, “Extend a kind welcome to those who are weak in faith” (14:1). He wants our arms to be stretched out in a gesture of acceptance. Even before someone knocks on the door, we open it wide.

During these days of Eastertide, Christians celebrate the activity of the Holy Spirit in our midst. Gifts bestowed on each of us always extend to benefit others in a community of worship. Walking with Jesus in the power of the Spirit, we do not travel an isolated path for fulfillment of each separate self. Every grace I receive links me to my fellows. I don’t embrace a spirituality that focuses on me in exclusive attention to my inner being and its development. The Spirit does invite me to greater attentiveness to who I am and how I can make myself advance in perfection. But I am never just by myself in a deep valley of me-ness. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ instructions and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Christ calls us to community.

The mysteries of Jesus’ dying and rising from the dead and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit are events involving the whole people of God. When some of His followers witness a manifestation of the Risen Lord, at once they rush back to share their joyous astonishment with the rest. Mary Magdalene at the tomb and the two travelers who stop to eat with Him at Emmaus are so overcome with the realization that the Crucified One has returned that they run to pass on the extraordinary news as quickly as

possible. This was gladness too overwhelming to hold onto just for themselves. It became all the more glorious as it was shared.

Certainly there are times when we want to be alone with Jesus, speaking to Him in a heart-to-heart exchange. We open ourselves to His presence in a silence that quiets all inner planning and desiring. Afterwards, we move back into an atmosphere of relatedness, where dealing with others is the necessary rhythm of the hours. We carry within us a deep awareness of the Son of God, Who redeems every moment of the time we pass through. His features are traced in those we meet. We hope we reveal more of Him to them through our interchange. St. Paul writes in his letter to Philemon, “And my prayer is that your sharing of the faith with others may enable you to know all the good which is ours in Christ” (6). In such sharing we gain immeasurably. The apostle continues, “I find great joy and comfort in your love, because through you the hearts of God’s people have been refreshed” (Phlm 7).

A few of us may be called to a radical solitude. The vocation to be a hermit is rare but valuable for the Body of Christ. The one so called does not seek aloneness because living with others might be unpleasant. The eremitical way finds holiness in profound detachment. It aims at closer union with God and in that loving union, all the faithful are served.

During this Pascal season, our fellow-Christians in New Sweden, Maine are bearing a terrible burden of pain and loss. Our hearts reach out them in their suffering as we ask our Savior to help them in the tragic events they are experiencing.

Whenever we assemble together we realize “the Lord (as) the strength of His people.” We sing with confidence, “Save Your people and bless Your inheritance. Feed them and carry them forever” (Ps 28:8,9). In the Church’s worship, we energize one another through mutual caring. **“This, remember, is the message you heard from the beginning: we should love one another” (1 Jn 3:11).**

Sister Margaret Dorgan, DCM