**Homily for 19th January Epiphany 2**

This first month or so in the new year can be such a busy and joyful time all these Sundays after Christmas and Epiphany, celebrating the birth of Jesus, the different ways in which Jesus is revealed or made manifest to ever increasing numbers of people. Like ripples from a pebble cast into a pool, the knowledge of Jesus spreads out from Bethlehem.

Despite the recent dark times of war and other bad news, we still have Jesus’s own assurance of ultimate joy and gladness. In our gospel reading today the story of the wedding at Cana, which is seen as the first sign he gave as an adult, of who he is and what he is here for, Jesus is showing us, giving us a glimpse of how the story will end. Not with suffering and shame as we might expect, knowing as we do of his journey to the Cross, but with joy, abundance, and miraculous surprise: the water became wine and He rose from the dead.
It is a sign that God whom Jesus reveals to us, is not absent or detached from his followers. He is the God who is with us, who has delight in and concern for our whole lives, shown by His mere presence at the wedding feast, and shares His abundant generosity in more than just meeting our needs in the midst of everyday life. He calls to us to move from the mere outward purity, symbolised by the water for ritual washing, to a transformation of inward joy, symbolised by the wine. With the coming of Jesus comes new and transformed living.
Even then there were those present who wondered just who this Jesus was and that wonder continues to this day.

Also today we are engaged in prayer for Christian Unity and in a celebration of the Council of Nicaea which produced the Nicene Creed just 1,700 years ago. So what is that all about ?
Well -put simply this is what happened. The early Church in all its diversity, its different locations different countries and traditions, often found itself arguing over proper doctrine and heresy, most often focused on the nature of Christ, who is he really, what kind of being is he? It still happens today, and we still struggle to maintain unity amongst ourselves as Christians because of our different understandings of God .

This [ecumenical council](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecumenical_council) at Nicaea was the first of many efforts to achieve [consensus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consensus_decision-making) in the church ,through an [assembly](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislature) representing all of [Christendom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christendom). The Council met from May until the end of July in the year 325, it was called by the Emperor Constantine to try and get people to be reconciled over differences of doctrine. So today when we are praying for again for Christian unity would be an ideal time to give thanks for 1,700 years of continuing effort by people of goodwill to achieve closer unity, and to earn to live together, in faith, and with the mystery of God in Christ, as God with us.
Our lack of unity has often been seen as a scandal, which on one level it is, but on another level difference by itself ,is not necessarily scandalous at all, rather it might be a source of strength and flexibility, for there is more than one way of practising our faith or of following in Jesus’s footsteps, because we are all different in our gifts, in our needs, in our responses to God’s call and to our faith.
We here in Church today, as one body not because we are all the same, but because “we all share in one bread”. not necessarily in the same doctrines or beliefs about that bread. It is violent disagreement, and refusal to accept one another that will become scandalous.
Having said that there are beliefs that we all hold in common and the Nicene Creed was an early attempt to draw this commonality together. It has lasted through religious and political conflict for 1,700 years a common statement of the mystery of faith for many Christians of many denominations.
Most Christians have common views about baptism, we baptise with water. and in the name of the Trinity, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But even we do it differently.
But on the other hand when it comes to Holy Communion there is a huge range of understanding , and there are some Christians who do not celebrate the Lords Supper in any form, others who do so every day and yet others once a year and everything in between, and they may all believe something different about what they are doing, just as we here might. But most of them and us can join in the Nicene creed

In his letter to the Romans St Paul says “in Christ we, though many, form one body, and not all the members have the same function, each member belongs to all the others.”
And In our reading today from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians he shows us some of the positive values of difference neatly summarised he says

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good**.”
We know that no one of us has all the gifts needed to bring in the kingdom of God, all of us and all our gifts are needed to contribute. And this distribution of those gifts is also in the hands of God “All these , says St Paul are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.”

The key phrase here is “for the common good” it’s not about me or you but about us, it tells us that practising our faith is all about service and the sharing of gifts, so that all of us, and all our communities benefit from God’s generosity.
We are all made in the image of God, which might mean that God can be seen in each of us individually but it also certainly means that all of us are needed together to show the image of God in completeness to the world. Sharing our different insights and understandings with each other is a really good way of learning more about God and our faith.
As we consider our unity on the common journey of faith and those things that we share with all faithful people, so we pray with people of all our churches for this week:

God of our journeys
Christ of our shorelines
Spirit of endless horizons
beckon us towards unity.
Challenge us to step out of our upper rooms and safe spaces,
to be bringers of light and peace.
Help us be reconciled to ourselves
to each other, and to you,
when we confront the pain of division,
and send us out in your love and compassion
that we might live in the way of Jesus. Amen