

Day of Prayer for Christian Unity Service
The Pro-Cathedral of the Assumption
Sunday, January 22, 2012 ✠ 2:00 PM

“Whoever serves me must follow me”

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

***‘Let these dark fiends rule over you,
Bow down before your wood and stone;
Be you the lifeless pontifex
Of gods as dead as you, yourself.***

***‘But we, O Dacian, will confess
The Father, Author of all light,
And Jesus Christ, His only Son,
As one true God, and Him adore.’***

So pens Aurelius Prudentius Clemens, Christian poet of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. The poet’s subject matter is St. Vincent of Saragossa, whose feast day is celebrated today by Catholic and Anglican Churches, and whose witness in life and in death is

commendable for Christians of all stripes and denominations. The scene is the trial of Vincent, a deacon, and Valerius, Vincent's bishop. Vincent was a preacher on behalf of Valerius, who had a speech impediment. Presiding over the trial was the Roman governor and Christian persecutor, Dacianus (or Dacian), who had these men hauled before him for representing the faith of Jesus Christ. The bishop, due to his speech impediment, could not speak. And so it is the deacon who speaks boldly on behalf of them both, and he doesn't mince words. You can have your pagan gods, says Vincent, but we shall not bow down to them, for our allegiance is with the One True God:

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For his bold and steadfast witness to Christ, Vincent is tortured and martyred in the year 304. For his faith, he refused to compromise. The name “Vincent” means to “prevail” or “conquer,” and one can see how he lives up to his name—in the face of the darkness of sin and doubt, Vincent’s virtue and faith shines through, and his hope remains unshaken in a world of despair.

Why, you might wonder, would I begin my remarks on this afternoon of Prayer for Christian Unity

by highlighting Vincent? Simply because Vincent stands alongside countless men and women down the ages, of different lands and of different backgrounds, who have done much the same: lived for the same faith, preached for the same faith, and died for the same faith. And the centre of that faith is one and the same: Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. The blood of the martyrs is a common language that holds all Christians together, no matter their time and circumstances of the past, and no matter ours in the present. All that blood is shed in solidarity and in witness to the precious Blood shed of that One Divine Life, shed for all of us on the Cross for the Redemption of the whole world. This is what binds us together. This is the faith worth living for, and this is the faith worth dying for.

All of us are called to labour and sacrifice and suffer for the Gospel on various levels and in various ways, perhaps not by literal blood-shedding and martyrdom; but by our own means, in our own stations, we are meant to “die daily” to the world in order to live for the Kingdom of Christ’s reign. This is what binds us together: one Lord, one faith, one birth.

“Whoever serves me must follow me,” says Jesus, “and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.” And where the life of Jesus leads, of course, is ultimately death—death as the sure gateway to Resurrection. True life, Jesus teaches, is a dying to self so that each of us can be bound to each other in new, fruitful, and presently unimaginable ways. “A grain of wheat,” a

single entity, must fall to the earth and die, or else it remains singular, insulated, and impoverished. But when that single entity no longer remains closed off to itself and its own darkened life—in a vain effort to preserve itself—then it opens itself up to new possibilities of life beyond speculation. Much fruit is born, and that is the purpose of the seed. The same is indeed true for us. The faithful here in North Bay embrace riches of spirit and fellowship when we come together as one in preference to remaining isolated. According to His Holiness, the late John Paul II, “The entire life of Christians is marked by a concern for ecumenism; and they are called to let themselves be shaped, as it were, by that concern” ... “Thus, it is absolutely clear that ecumenism, the movement

promoting Christian unity, is not just some sort of 'appendix' which is added to the Church's traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does; it must be like the fruit borne by a healthy and flourishing tree which grows to its full stature."

We are here this afternoon, as branches of a healthy and flourishing tree, held together and supported by the one and same trunk of faith; and nurtured at the roots by the blood of the same Jesus and strengthened by that of the saints and martyrs, our common witness to our common faith; and we are here together this afternoon to bear much fruit, and to witness together as one. Together we speak with one voice as we confess one Lord with our lips. Called to

prevail, like Vincent, we are called to give all for All; to devote ourselves to loving the Love which shall never fail, wherever that may lead us, and whatever befall. For the continuing conversion and shaping of the seeds which we each bear within us, we pray to the Lord for the continued relinquishing of self and for the continued acquisition of unity, for increase of charity, and for the continued health, growth, and flourishing of the redeemed tree of life born of faith, so that the mission of Christ may go forward in North Bay and in all the corners of the earth. For this we pray, and for all of us here today we give humble thanks, O Lord. Amen.

Father A. E. Nussey