

We're under attack by the devil. If you look at the box score, it sure does look like we're losing the battle. There have been around 61 million abortions in the United States since 1973. We're currently holding approximately 2.3 million people in our criminal justice system. Almost half of all marriages in the U.S. will end in divorce or separation. Only one-third of Americans attend a religious service of any kind on a regular basis.

Closer to home, only 39% of all Catholics attend Mass frequently while only 25% of young adults in their 20's attend Mass consistently. In the 1960's, there were 5.2 million students in almost 13,000 Catholic schools. Now, there are only 1.8 million students in 6,352 Catholic schools. The last ten years have seen a 19.2% decline in Catholic school enrollment.

At the heart of these statistics is division. We live in a culture that breeds division. We're told that we don't need anyone else and, most of all, we don't need God. Division is the work of the devil. Dividing people is his favorite tactic. The very word "devil" itself comes from a Greek word that means "to throw across", as in throwing an obstacle across someone's path, dividing that person from their goal; or as in throwing obstacles between people, dividing them from each other.

The devil sows division and discord among us as a way of insulting God, whom he hates. The devil spreads lies. He spreads misinformation. He tempts us to think badly of others, to speak badly of others, to think we're right and everybody else is wrong. He does this in families, in churches, in communities, and in businesses. He keeps us full of resentment and anger. He keeps us fighting among ourselves so we're distracted from what truly matters. The devil would like nothing more than to permanently separate us from God and from each other. That's what evil is all about. Therefore, our effectiveness in building up the Church and winning souls to Christ is severely diminished.

Pope Benedict XVI saw the signs of a culture in dire need of help. He said in his message for the World Day of Peace in 2010, “Humanity needs a profound cultural renewal. It needs to rediscover those values which can serve as the solid basis for building a brighter future for all. Our present crises – be they economic, food-related, environmental or social – are ultimately also moral crises, and all of them are interrelated. They require us to rethink the path which we are travelling together. Specifically, they call for a lifestyle marked by sobriety and solidarity.”

Unity is the solution to combatting the devil and his divisive tactics. Division is the devil’s work, but reconciliation and unity are Christ’s work. God, the source of all goodness, is in His very essence a communion of persons, a unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is all about unity and we’re created in His image. We’re meant for communion with God and each other.

In today’s second reading, Saint Paul envisioned the Church as one great body composed of many members with different functions, strengths, and weaknesses. The Body of Christ may be made up of different parts, each with its own gifts, given for the good of the whole, but we’re still one Body and have received one Spirit in Christ. We aren’t expected to all have the same role within the Body, just as the head, the toe, and the heart don’t have the same role in a human body. We’re all expected to use our differences to complement each other and work together to bring about the kingdom of God.

St. Teresa of Avila is quoted as saying, “Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks out with compassion on the world. Yours the feet with which he chooses to go about doing good. For as he is the head, so are you the members, and we are all one in Christ Jesus.”

You see, Jesus no longer walks the earth unless feet like ours are there to take Him where He needs to go. He has no hands, unless we offer Him our own, to reach out and touch people who live in oppressive conditions. Ours are quite literally the eyes through which He can look out on our world today with compassion. Jesus and His original band of disciples aren't around anymore to meet the responsibilities to bring good news to the poor, to captives, to the blind, and the oppressed. All Jesus has on earth now is us. It's up to us to be His body.

Have you ever wondered which part of Christ's Body you're intended to be? Maybe you're intended to be part of His mind, teaching the faith. Or part of His heart, showing the care of Christ. Or part of His hands, reaching out to others. Or part of His feet, taking the Gospel to different places. Or part of His ears, listening to the anxieties of this weary culture. Or part of His lips, speaking His truth.

It's funny how the Holy Spirit works. When I was preparing for this homily, a song by Casting Crowns called *If We Are The Body* came on in my car. The song is from 2003 so it doesn't get played very often. But yet there it was and the lyrics of the chorus caught my attention. They're quite appropriate for today's message. The chorus goes, "If we are the body, why aren't His arms reaching? Why aren't His hands healing? Why aren't His words teaching? Why aren't His feet going? Why is His love not showing people there is a way?"

The best answer I could come up with is that, unfortunately, the divisive tactics of the devil have spread into our individual lives. We've bought into the notion that we must compartmentalize our lives. We're pressured to only be Christians for just an hour a week at Mass and only when it's convenient. The rest of the time, we're supposed to hide our Christianity. We shouldn't be Christians in public forums, in workplaces, and in schools. As a result, we don't fully live the mission we received from Christ at our Baptism.

That's not how Jesus intended for things to go. We're meant to live out our faith in God and our Christian values all the time in every place regardless of the consequences, when it's popular and when it's not. That's what Jesus did and it led to His crucifixion. No one said it would be easy to follow Christ.

A vigorous faith is needed if we're going to effectively confront a culture that differs in so many ways from what Saint Paul envisioned. Part-time Christianity does no one any good. Just like we must put an end to the things that divide us from each other and from God, we must also put an end to compartmentalizing our own lives. Only full-time Christianity can bring glad tidings to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and proclaim a culture acceptable to the Lord.

Today, as we kick off Catholic Schools Week, we spotlight an environment that provides hope for building a brighter future. Young people are our hope for cultural renewal and we're blessed to have in our parish a Catholic school that serves preschool through 8th grade students. Incarnation Catholic School is a special place for our young people to grow each day in faith and academics. It's a place where they can play and pray as well as learn how to love.

It's said that we learn best where we're loved most. Without a doubt, Christ is the one that loves us more than anyone else. At ICS, our young people get to encounter Christ in our faculty and staff on a daily basis. They also develop skills for questioning, critiquing, and challenging the culture. They begin to learn what is art and what is merely a cheap imitation of art. They learn to distinguish between useful information and what is actually propaganda.

They begin to experience the difference between a life shaped by Gospel values and a life built on the shifting sands of pop culture. In those classrooms and hallways, they can gain the faith they'll need to effectively engage the culture of the 21st century. Our real hope of

transforming the culture and restoring unity in our world lies in environments like our school where faith and culture walk hand in hand.