

# Express the Unity We Have in Christ

## Sermon Text: Philippians 4:21-23

<sup>21</sup> Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. <sup>22</sup> All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. <sup>23</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

1.) What is the Biblical definition of a saint (ἅγιος)? How does it compare to the Catholic definition given below? How does its usage in these verses prove that the Catholic understanding cannot be correct?

**954** The three states of the Church. ...At the present time some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth. Others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory, contemplating 'in full light, God himself triune and one, exactly as he is': All of us, however, in varying degrees and in different ways share in the same charity towards God and our neighbours, and we all sing the one hymn of glory to our God. All, indeed, who are of Christ and who have his Spirit form one Church and in Christ cleave together.

**956** The intercession of the saints. "Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness.... They do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus.... So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped."

2.) What were some of the common earthly connections that may have united the congregations in Rome and Philippi? What is it that unites all Christians?

3.) Through Paul's imprisonment the gospel had now even reached into Caesar's household. Trace the milestones in the spread of the gospel in the early church. (cf. the Book of Acts)

## First Lesson: Isaiah 56:1-8

- <sup>1</sup> *This is what the LORD says: "Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Blessed is the man who does this, the man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil."*
- <sup>3</sup> *Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely exclude me from his people." And let not any eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree."*
- <sup>4</sup> *For this is what the LORD says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—*
- <sup>5</sup> *to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off.*
- <sup>6</sup> *And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—*

- <sup>7</sup> *these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.*"
- <sup>8</sup> *The Sovereign LORD declares—he who gathers the exiles of Israel: "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered."*

1.) It was a constant temptation for the Israelites to see themselves as God's favored people based on their bloodline or their merits or their obedience, rather than God's pure grace. Yet God also regularly proclaimed his desire for the Gentiles to turn to him and be saved. What does God all include in a relationship with him (v. 1-2)? How does this compare to the New Testament message (cf. Luke 3:3, 7-8; Matthew 4:17)?

**Luke 3:3,7-8** [John the Baptist] went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ...<sup>7</sup> John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Produce fruit in keeping with repentance."

**Matthew 4:17** From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

2.) Imagine you were a non-Jew hearing these words. What phrases would you find particularly encouraging?

3.) Diversity, equity, and inclusion are touchstones in our society. How does this reading address these matters in regards to the church? Are there any similarities or differences?

### **Gospel: Matthew 12:46-50**

*While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. <sup>47</sup> Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."*

*<sup>48</sup> He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" <sup>49</sup> Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. <sup>50</sup> For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*

1.) How does this clarify what it means to be "in (the sphere of) Christ Jesus" from Philippians 4:21?

2.) How is it a comfort to you to know that in Christ we are a family of faith? What practical steps might we take to promote and grow this unity more and more?