



The Episcopal Diocese of Long Island

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Sermon for the Fourteenth Sunday of Pentecost

September 6, 2020

The Right Rev. Lawrence C. Provenzano

Bishop of Long Island

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

John Donne, the English poet and priest, dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London in the early 17th century, wrote these words, "No man is an island entire of himself. Every man is a piece of the continent."

Donne's metaphorical prose must have in some way, been inspired by the theology developed from today's gospel. Relationship with one another, especially the Body of Christ, but in all of humanity, is the focus of this gospel teaching.

We are not islands, but rather intimately connected and necessary for one another. Or as St. Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians, "There is one body, but many members all baptized by the same Spirit."

We find ourselves in a critical moment in the history of humanity. There are loud voices encouraging us to segregate, isolate, single out the other and disenfranchise people as a means to greatness. In the wrong hands and hearts this very gospel could be and has been misinterpreted, misused as a means of winning an argument, winning a point, stifling opposition, stifling opposing views, victimizing God's people.

It has even been misused in its understanding of the role of the church in society.

The focus of the gospel today is to promote and safeguard relationship, relationship within the body. We are all human and sin is a reality in our lived experience. In the face of sin, sin perpetrated on one another, the goal is always relationship if possible, reconciliation if possible, or at the very least, the peace that comes from truth telling and truth hearing, and the treatment of the offending party as a Gentile or a tax collector, not as an enemy to be destroyed or eradicated, belittled or sinned against in retaliation for sin.

C. S. Lewis in his book *The Great Divorce* describes hell as a great dark place, where there is no contact between people. He says that hell started out small, but people quarreled with one another and moved away from one another. And there were more quarrels and more people kept moving away from one another. Finally, no one could even see each other and there they lived apart in darkness and in hell.

That hell is what Jesus is encouraging us to avoid in this life and in the life to come in the teaching of this gospel. The goal is reconciliation, or at the very least, peace in our hearts, in our minds, and in our communities.

So my sisters and brothers, if you come to the altar to present your gift to there find that your brother or sister has anything against you, or you have something against your brother or your sister, go first and be reconciled and then come and offer your gift so that there can be peace, there can be reconciliation, and we can be saved from the hell in which we often live.