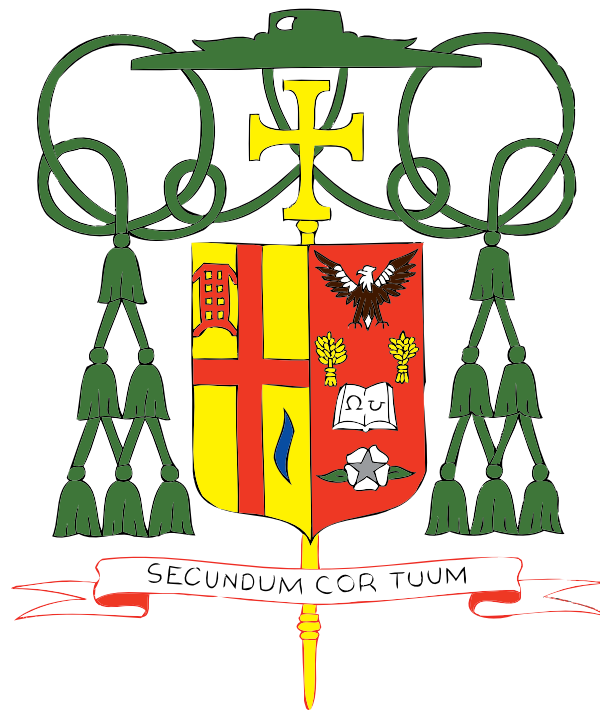


# From Many Cultures, One Church

A PASTORAL LETTER



**+MOST REVEREND PATRICK J. ZUREK**

**Bishop of Amarillo  
Solemnity of All Saints  
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*E Pluribus Unum – Out of many, one!* Our Founding Fathers in the United States chose a beautiful motto for our country. It is better understood as ‘out of many cultures—one nation!’ In many ways this is our strength as citizens of the United States of America. Yet our history clearly shows that we have had our dark moments; Native Americans being forced to live in reservations and the native Africans imported into a life of slavery.

We have also had our shining moments. We have welcomed peoples of every nation, color, ethnicity, race, language and culture. Many came without education or money. Yet they have carved a niche for themselves in our American Society.

*E Pluribus Unum—out of many a unity is created.* Yet, contemporary experience in the United States betrays a nation that is divided in so many ways. We have become polarized. Unity is bantered about, but is so very difficult to achieve. There seems to be an intrinsic principle lacking or preventing this unity. There is a poem that comes to mind that I learned as a child.

*“Something there is that doesn’t love a wall!  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.  
(They say...)*

*...Good fences make good neighbors.  
Why do they make good neighbors?*

*...Isn’t it where there are cows?  
But here there are no cows.  
Before I build a wall I’d ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out.*

*...Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,  
That wants it down!*

*(Robert Frost 1874-1963, Mending Wall, © Poetry 2005-2008)*

**It begs the question, ‘Is there something that doesn’t love unity?’ Shall we leave behind the word ‘unity’ and rather use an ‘ecclesial’ term? The greetings used by the priest at the beginning of a liturgy are simple but very important. The greeting constitutes the assembly of the faithful as the Apostolic Community gathered for a particular Mass. It shows our continuity with the early Church. One of these greetings uses the word, *communio*, or communion. Presently we translate it as *fellowship*, but the more rich theological word is “communion”.**

*The Grace of Our Lord Jesus, the Love of God the Father and the Communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all!*

**This greeting clearly tells us that our relationship as the faithful gathered for Mass is one of a deep communion with the Triune God which must also be reflected in our relationship with each other.**

**In fact, this word, *communio*, or communion, is so rich in meaning that the early Fathers of the Church used it to describe the act of receiving of the Body and Blood of the Lord at Mass. My sense is that most of the faithful truly believe that they are entering into a very personal communion with Christ when they receive His Body. However, most may not be aware that they are actually entering into a very special relationship or communion, with all the others who are receiving His Body. It was St. Augustine who reflected that when he consecrated the bread at Mass, he was actually holding the Body of Christ in his hands. Yet, he added, when he looked up at the congregation assembled before him, he was beholding the Body of Christ there, also. He commented, “What a great mystery!”**

**“Communion means the fusion of existence; just as in the taking of nourishment the body assimilates foreign matter to itself, and is thereby enabled to live, in the same way, my “I” is “*assimilated*” to that of Jesus, it is made similar to Him in an exchange that increasingly breaks through the lines of division. This same event takes place in the case of all who communicate; they are all assimilated to this “bread” and thus are made**

**one among themselves—one body.”** (Called to Communion-Understanding the Church Today, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Ignatius Press, 1996, p. 37)

*“Communion makes the Church”* (John Paul II, Ecclesia Eucharistia), by *“breaching an opening in the wall of subjectivity and ‘gathering’ {the constituting of the Apostolic Community—today} in which the Lord joins us to one another.* (Ratzinger, p. 37)

## Part II

When John Paul II became Pope, he re-introduced the Church to a theological reality that was very common to the early Church. In one of his first Encyclicals he wrote of the profound calling that man and woman have from God. He spoke of the inner life of the Most Holy Trinity, that is, of the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The early Fathers of the Church preached and wrote of this, also.

The author of Genesis, in the First Creation Narrative, began this discussion when he wrote, *“God created man...in His own image and likeness He created them...male and female He created them.”* (Gen. 1:27)

St. John in his Letters made the discussion even more profound when he wrote, *“God is Love, and he who abides in love, abides in God and God in him.”* (1 Jn 4:16)

Hence, man and woman were created in the image of a God who revealed Himself as a community of persons who live in the mutual giving and accepting of love. St. John wrote that *“God is Love”*. Our theological reflection, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit says that in Christ, God was revealed as a Father who was so full of love, that even though He is perfect in Himself before all time began, He *“began”* the Second Person of the Trinity. This love and its relationship to the Second Person of the Trinity is described

as the love of a “*father for a son*” and the love of a “*son for a father*”.

The Father loves the Son unconditionally and completely and the Son loves the Father unconditionally and completely. And, the Father accepts the love from the Son completely and unconditionally as the Son accepts the love from the Father completely and unconditionally. In other words, this love is mutual and reciprocal! Furthermore, this love between the Father and the Son is so perfect that it “*spirates*” the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who also gives and receives this love unconditionally and completely.

It is in the “*image*” of this Triune God, three Divine Persons, yet ONE God, that man and woman, were created! Hence, man is called to community...to communitarian life...to relationship with a God who is a community of Persons. Man is called to LOVE! He is called to love God and to love neighbor, as he loves himself.

When a man or woman is baptized, he begins to share in this Divine Life. He is the same and yet different! He becomes a child of God, a brother/sister to Jesus and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. The baptized person also receives a *special calling*...the call to HOLINESS. But, what does this mean? What does it entail?

Simply put, ‘what is holiness?’ Is it praying all the time? Is it being ‘super pious’? Is it just for priests, deacons and nuns? Or, is it for everyone?

Obviously...it is for everyone!

But what is it? The prophets quote God as revealing to them, “*As high as the Heavens are above the earth, are my ways different from yours!*” (Is. 55:9) This is not a keen insight or even a brilliant observation by the prophet. It is revelation by the Father Himself. The prophet follows the quote with, “*Thus says the Lord!*”

If “*God’s ways are not our ways*”, then we must examine our ways. The world does not call us to go out of self to love and serve the other. The human societies and cultures in which we live, call us to be more concerned with only one person...ME! Look at the conflicts and wars in the world yesterday and today...now! They are caused by a greed or lust for power, material goods...pitting one race, culture, country, socio-economic group or person over and against another. It wants us to accumulate material goods just for one’s own use; and is actually done for the personal profit of the seller.

Let us look at Jesus, His Gospel and the Church we love. All three call us to go beyond self...to actually love another...to be concerned about the *other*, even an enemy, or someone we dislike. We are called to love those different from ourselves. It is the Church, which preaches the Gospel of Christ that calls the Black, the White, the Brown, the Red and the Yellow to embrace each other...to live in harmony with one another...to live as ONE! All humanity is called to live “*in communio*” in a relationship that reflects and respects Trinitarian love and communion.

Holiness is to strive, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to live this Trinitarian communion. Holiness is the CALL to LOVE, in the mutual giving and acceptance of it, even and especially, when the world says NO. Holiness truly calls us to go beyond self and really be concerned with the other.

The Beatitudes that we read on the Solemnity of All Saints are a call to live in this world, but with our eyes and hearts set on the other world, God’s world... Rather than automatically condemn or accept whatever the “Right” or “Left” condemns or vigorously promotes, the Beatitudes call us to be a ‘discerning’ people. Christ and His Gospel need to be the standard for our judgment...not the world!

In a culture that negates God and promotes the superiority of power, education and socio-economic status, Matthew teaches, “*blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*” (Matt. 5:3) He is saying blessed

are those who depend on God and God alone, not on themselves, their power, wealth or status.

*“Blessed are the pure of heart.”* Blessed are those who do not say one thing and do another. They have no duplicity of speech. They do not attempt to deceive. Since the heart can be the seat of good or evil, a truly “pure heart” is one that is purged of all that could lead to sinfulness.

*“Blessed are the merciful.”* Many in the Social Sciences like to say that the most difficult phrase in any language is “I am sorry...forgive me!” Or “I forgive you!” Society and culture do not promote this...Christ DOES!!! He does this through His own Passion and Death! This is certainly not man’s practice! However, it is our “Call”!

*“Blessed are the peace-makers, they shall be called children of God.”* Blessed are those who try to bring Trinitarian COMMUNION, ONENESS, LOVE and PEACE to the world in which they live. They are bridge-builders to God’s Life and Love. They don’t seek the world’s concept of “divide and conquer”. They are ambassadors of Christ...of reconciliation. Pope Paul VI wrote: *“If you want peace, work for justice.”* Benedict XVI added: *“If you want peace, pray for it.”*

*“Blessed are those who suffer for the sake of righteousness.”* Blessed are those who really suffer because of sin, selfishness, greed and injustice. They cannot stand the world’s promotion of the destruction of the dignity of human person. They cannot tolerate the indifference that society sees in living the life of Virtue. They seek to stop the exploitation of children or women for personal pleasure or gain.

In short, blessed are those who are so immersed in the loving inner life of the Trinity that they just cannot tolerate a world that is blinded to the image of God in which man and woman were created. HOLY are those who truly suffer in Christ for the sins of humanity and long for man’s ways to be different from the world and the cultures in which we live. Truly, are they

**HOLY** who long to establish on this earth a way of life that reflects the inner life of the Holy Trinity...the way of life that reflects unconditional, mutual and reciprocal Trinitarian Love.

All of this must begin with me! Not long ago we were in the midst of the concern with H1N1 or Swine Flu. People were sanitizing their hands continually because of fear of contagion. There is something much more contagious than any disease...that is a person who truly lives his or her FAITH. This is what made Christianity spread so quickly in the Mediterranean world after Christ's Resurrection. Be so fired up in your love of Christ, that you become contagious!! Be a witness of Christ!

This is what the Saints have done. This is probably what billions and billions of people have done down through the ages. Some of these were our own relatives and friends. For this reason they are called HOLY. This is our call, too. We were created to reflect the image of God.

This is what Jesus was referring to in the Gospel of Matthew. *"In short, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."* (Matt. 5:48) That is, reflect your nature. Reflect the love that is in God...that is God. And remember, at your Baptism you entered this Trinitarian Life. In the celebration of the Eucharist and in receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, you strengthen and make more real, this life of God within you. Simply put, you grow in Holiness! You enter into true *communio*...a very deep relationship with God and with the all the Baptized.

## Part III

Keeping all of this in mind, let us apply this to the global phenomenon of the migration of peoples. Regardless of the continent, large groups of people find themselves moving from one country to another and from one culture to another. In the United States this phenomenonal movement of peoples of many cultures exists throughout the country. It is especially seen,



but not limited to, the movement of Hispanic peoples. This obviously brings richness, but also a great challenge. The richness includes the sharing of the greatest values that come from the Faith, respect for human life and the dignity of the human person of one culture with another. The challenge includes the complex reality of retaining, exchanging or blending the myths, sacred symbols and values of one culture with another.

As was stated earlier, through our Baptism we have been conformed to be part of the Body of Christ, the Church, existing in this world. We also become part of the Kingdom of God that will only reach its perfection in the world to come. The Book of Revelation gives a description of this Kingdom:

Christ,

*“With your blood you purchased for God  
men of every race and tongue,  
of every people and nation.  
You made of them a kingdom,  
and priests to serve our God,  
and they shall reign on the earth.”* (Rev. 59c-10)

While Original Sin has destroyed the unity that mankind had with God and with all other humans in the beginning, through Baptism we enter the tomb with Christ, we rise with Him and become part of the Kingdom of God. We also receive the Holy Spirit and enter into the *communio* of the Holy Trinity with all the baptized.

The challenge that comes with the mingling of distinct cultures can also be perceived as an *opportunity* or a *moment of Grace*. It is an opportunity to re-examine our “Call to Holiness” and our willingness to respond with the mind and heart of Jesus Christ. It is a moment of Grace if we invite the “power from on high”, the Holy Spirit to inspire and animate us to reflect the image of God in which we were created.

**From the earliest moments of our life our *enculturation* into a particular society begins. This is the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable them to become functioning members of society. It is “both a conscious and an unconscious process whereby a human person, as child and an adult, achieves competence in his culture” (E. Adamson Hoebel). This is a process through which one internalized the dreams, expectations, the rules, requirements and taboos of a given society. Through enculturation one learns the symbols that are sacred in a society or state, the flag, the national or state anthem, the pledge of allegiance; the folklore, the myths and the songs and dance of that culture. Religion or worship is inherent in culture; its values make that particular culture unique.” (Benedict XVI)**

**Two of my grandparents came from Europe. My maternal grandfather came from the area of Brno, Czech Republic. He arrived in the USA at the age of three. His wife, my maternal grandmother, was born in Texas of Czech-American parents. Grandfather was enculturated in the Czech Republic and grandmother in a Tex-Czech culture. The flags they identified with were distinct. So were their national anthems. The Czech they spoke was slightly different; it evolved in the Czech Republic, but was fixated in Texas with its arrival. Their common bond was really their Catholic Faith!**

**Practically the same could be said of the paternal side of my family. It was slightly more complicated by the addition of a third culture, German. Furthermore, this grandmother was also born in Texas with her enculturation being in the Tex-German culture.**

**My two grandfathers had underdone their enculturation in their own countries into their native culture. However, when they came to the USA they went through the process of *acculturation*; the process of learning the appropriate behaviors of one’s host culture. In reality they entered a new culture like a child and had to adapt themselves into the new reality. They learned the myths and sacred symbols of the USA. They learned English, accepted a new flag, a new national anthem, new national and state**

holidays, and slowly adapted to the new society. Their acculturation was not excessively restricted by the structures or relationships of their native society/culture. They realized they would never return to their native lands. They maintained the basic principles and values of their former society; hence, they retained their self-respect and dignity, but were still able to cope with all the challenges and opportunities of the new culture/society in the United States. *Acculturation* is also the letting go of that from the old culture/society which is not relevant in the new environment.

My two grandmothers, on the other hand, had an additional challenge; not only did they go through their own *enculturation* into their respective birth cultures in the USA, but they also experienced an *acculturation* into the culture of their foreign born husbands when they married. My grandfathers had to become child-like and learn new ways! However, they did not sense the need to give-up their cultural habits or language; nor were they pressured to do so! My grandfathers adapted and accepted many customs and even a new language from their host country. In a sense, they had a dual identity!

My grandfathers retained part of their cultural values, customs and language, but they also learned and accepted the values, customs and language of their new host culture. They did not *assimilate* into this new culture. *Assimilation* is much more thorough, all –encompassing, and takes much longer. From an objective, outside view, after having been assimilated, one could not determine if that person had been born within the USA or in another country. This is not what I am speaking of here. *Assimilation* usually takes place with the first generation born to the immigrant family, not with the immigrants themselves.

Regardless of the nature or characteristics of a “*host culture*”, perhaps, the Church is best equipped to facilitate this *acculturation* of the immigrant and the acceptance of the “*host country*” (USA) that is needed today.

**First, it appears to me that the Catholic Church is in a good position to take the leadership in this ever continuing process. There are many things that we Catholics, who were born here or who have lived here a long time and are in fact, the “Host” community, can do and offer today’s immigrants.**

**We can:**

- **Welcome them into our parishes as the persons they are: our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, fellow Catholics**
- **Provide forums in which the immigrant can share their plight of leaving their homeland, uprooting their families, leaving all that is familiar and moving to a foreign land**
- **Listen to their difficulties in migrating, and the fears they experienced and still experience**
- **Realize that they are grieving the loss of all they hold dear; their culture and native country, their flag! These are the realities in which they are rooted**
- **Help facilitate their learning of the new language, English, by providing more ESL Classes in our parishes**
- **Help them to understand and celebrate our national holidays**
- **Be patient and realize that any culture usually prefers to pray to God in their native language. As imperfect as bi-lingual liturgies are, if well-done, they truly can unite a community. Often these are necessitated by the lack of priests to celebrate more liturgies on a given Sunday or are restricted by schedule for special celebrations such as Christmas Midnight Mass or the Easter Triduum**
- **Come to a realization that they do not have to “give-up” their native language**
- **Recognize that every cultural group in the community of the Church ought to be invited to exercise leadership, especially as members of the Parish Pastoral Council, the Finance Council and Faith Formation Communities**

- Offer opportunities for formation and leadership development to enable them to participate in the advisory roles that exist in the Church
- Reach out in gratitude and appreciation for the Faith experiences, Popular Religiosity (devotions and processions), love and respect for that which is “sacred” and the commitment to the Church that is offered by the new cultural group

The Church refers to this process as *Ecclesial Integration*. This means that immigrants “are to be welcomed in our Church institutions at all levels. They are to be served in their language when possible, and their cultural values and religious traditions are to be respected. Beyond that, we must work toward mutual enrichment through interaction among all cultures.” (National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry, # 4)

This is truly a conversion process for us; and is actually a very significant part of our Christian Faith.

I also believe that our fellow Catholics who have joined us recently can do something. The immigrants can:

- Come to our Churches and know that they are welcomed as our brothers and sisters in Christ
- Realize that they have nothing to fear at our Catholic Churches...not from anyone
- Realize that the people in our parishes are often grieving, too...not the loss of a country, family or friends, but the loss of certain autonomy and becoming a minority in their own land which has always been pluri-cultural
- Make a concerted attempt to learn English. It will not only serve their *acculturation* and *ecclesial integration* in their new society, but it will also aid family life. {My maternal grandmother never learned English. The grandchildren, who were second generation Americans, did not learn Czech. My grandmother could never speak with her

**grandchildren. I would not want that to happen to the immigrants of today.}**

- **Learn to forgo the use of their national flags in public celebrations or in the Church. The guideline from our Bishops' Conference strongly suggests that no national flags be displayed in Church**
- **Attempt to learn the meaning of the national holidays that are celebrated in the USA and to celebrate them with their 'brothers and sisters' who are citizens or have *permanent resident* status**
- **Teach the people of the USA of their treasured values, especially in regard to Faith and family**
- **Be generous in offering themselves in the service of the Church with their particular gifts, talents, values and treasure**
- **Express their gratitude to the "Host" community for the blessings that they have experienced and received in their new Faith Community**
- **Being welcomed and integrated into the new Church community, may they in turn help to welcome and integrate others into the Parish**

**This, too, requires a conversion process on the part of our immigrant brothers and sisters.**

**From our Catholic Tradition it appears clear that both the members of the host culture and the immigrants themselves must participate in this *change of heart*. The recent Beatification of John Henry Cardinal Newman reminds me of one of his famous sayings; "*To live is to change; to be perfect is to have changed often!*"**

**It is a way to continue to inaugurate the Kingdom of God in this part of the vineyard. It is also part of Call to Holiness that we have received at our Baptism. It certainly enables us to be drawn deeper and deeper into the '*communio*' with each other and with Jesus that we experience in Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ. It is our goal and destiny for which we were created...to be drawn deep into the love and life of our Triune God.**

*“Christ and the Church are one body in the sense in which man and woman are one flesh, that is, in such a way that in their indissoluble spiritual-bodily union, they nonetheless remain unconfused and unmingled. The Church does not simply become Christ, she is ever the handmaid whom He lovingly raises to be His Bride and who seeks His face throughout these latter days...”* (Ratzinger, p. 39) It is in this unity, that we seek to do God’s Will!

This may seem a great challenge. In the eyes of the world, perhaps even impossible; however, we are children of God. We believe in Christ’s promise to be with us always through the presence of the Holy Spirit. St. Luke reminds us that *“all is possible with God”* (Lk 1:37) through the *“power from on High”* (Lk 24:49) which is the Holy Spirit.

It is the Pentecost event with its vehement wind and fire of the Holy Spirit that established the Church. The origin of the Church was not the decision of men. *“The Church is not the product of human willing but a creature of the Spirit of God. This Spirit overcomes the Babylonian world spirit. Man’s will to power, symbolized in Babel, aims at the goal of uniformity, because its interest is domination and subjection; it is precisely in this way that it brings forth hatred and division. God’s Spirit, on the other hand, is LOVE; for this reason he brings about recognition and creates unity in the acceptance of the otherness of the other person: the many languages are mutually comprehensible.”* (Ratzinger, p. 43)

The many cultures are able to embrace one another! Hence, this “vertical unification”, that is the participation in Trinitarian life and love, must be established for the “horizontal unification”, the love and respect for each human person, to become a reality. (Ratzinger, p. 76)

**Let us make the words of the Second Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation  
our prayer in this regard:**

*Father, make your Church throughout the world  
a sign of unity and an instrument of your peace.  
You have gathered us here around the table of your Son,  
in fellowship with the Virgin Mary, Mother of God,  
and all the saints.*

*In that new world  
where the fullness of your peace will be revealed,  
gather people of every race, language and way of life  
to share in the one eternal banquet  
with Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.*

**+Most Reverend Patrick J. Zurek, Bishop of Amarillo, Pastoral Letter:  
E Pluribus Unum – From Many Cultures, One Church,  
Solemnity of All Saints, St. Laurence Cathedral,  
November 1, 2010**