



*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col. 3: 15, 16)*

### **Jan 2015: Reflection - (Col. 3: 15, 16)**

There is an oft-forgotten call for an active Christian: to actively belong to a specific community of disciples. The life in Christ is not an abstract spiritual exercise, but a joyful and eager participation in the love and life of the visible body of Christ.

The Pauline letters in the Bible are written to his disciples and communities to follow up the work of evangelization that he had already initiated with them. Most of his letters follow a pattern. The first part would deal with more theological aspects of the salvific work in Jesus and the gift of salvation, and the latter part on the practical aspects of living this new life in Christ. This part would include pastoral instructions on carrying on this renewed style of life and the dynamics of participation in community. They tell us of the importance as well as the practical aspects of fellowship among the disciples of Christ, like the one we read in Colossians.

St Paul knew that the core of Christian message is that Jesus came into flesh and so the word of Christ has to take flesh in a community. Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* speaks of the process of evangelization leading people to a living community. Acceptance of the Gospel “cannot remain abstract and unincarnated, [but] reveals itself concretely by a visible entry into a community of believers” (23). For a Christian, belonging actively in a community is so very important, because that is a real participation in the life of the Triune God to which one

is initiated in Baptism. That is the best place to live the word of God and also for effective formation for today's Christian living. And a living fellowship is the best mode of evangelization, inviting new ones to the beauty of the visible life in Christ (Jn 13:35).

The passage we reflect on points not only to the call to belong, but also to the dynamics and the step by step process of growing as the body of Christ. For a person, fellowship is not one or many visits to a group, but rather a journey of belonging to a specific set of people or the visible body of Christ. And that belonging is a step by step process, starting with a sowing time, followed by a growing time, developing into a fruition time. In other words, a Christian's maturity is achieved not merely through a program or even a set of teachings, but through the participation in the life of the body of Christ. The Church is a living body, today often referred to as a Community of communities, and through a lively participation in my small fellowship deeply linked to the wider Church, I become a living branch in the true vine of Christ (Jn 15: 5).

In the fellowship how does a person receive the guidance for maturity? Firstly, a person is drawn to a body of Christians and sustained in it through the joyful and visible love and caring. The Psalmist exclaims, "How good and pleasant it is!" (Ps 133). Singing plays a very significant role in cementing the sense of unity and also for preparing the foundation to build up the joy and praise in the group. And it is the word of Christ that builds up the body of Christ, the reflection on and sharing of the word of God. The discovery and exercise of a variety of charisms leads to the rich fruits of mission in a fellowship. The life of the community is built up through various practical elements like spending time together, communicating with one another, sharing food and real support offered to the brothers and sisters. And the test of a true fellowship is the fruits it bears in the form of love and service in the Church as well as in the wider world, especially by being agents of greater love and unity everywhere. On the contrary, becoming an exclusive club of praying Christians, cut out from others, can be a temptation which should be avoided by every growing community.

We are called to belong. Perhaps it is easier for us to be spiritual tourists visiting some group as and when we can, rather than truly belonging to a real body of the faithful. The call to Christian growth demands that we are to be in a specific group, the members of which we know well and in it we are known intimately. There we learn perseverance in faith and the lessons of sharing and forgiveness. In an age when people run away from all forms of commitment, our participation in fellowship should teach us the secret of the 'steadfast love that endures forever' (Ps 118, 136).

And what place fellowship has in Jesus Youth movement? If you ask someone what is most beautiful about the movement, most would mention the deep family spirit they have experienced in the movement, which drew them to the Lord and built them up in a very joyful manner. A number of very beautiful forums are there in the movement, for a person to meet and be part of the living body of Christ, like, prayer groups, cell groups, Household and ministry groups, each of these meeting a specific need of a growing Christian. The Household, especially, is like a 'Tharavadu', the ancestral home that we are so familiar with, in which different generations gather together with a deep bond love and caring. May everyone of us eagerly make use of this privileged gift from the Lord to its fullest, "to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb 10: 24, 25).