

There are aspects of our culture and of our world that make it difficult for many people today to maintain, develop and live their faith. An obvious factor in this is the taken for granted secularism of so much of our public life. Another factor is the rate and extent of change that have become so much a part of our lives. For some such things have created a sense of the absence of God as well as a lack of clarity about basic moral values. A drift away from church involvement by many young people presents the church with an enormous challenge for the future.

Although Paul, in today's reading from his letter to the Ephesians, does not address the specific issues with which we are confronted, he does point to certain fundamental truths that can and should speak to us in whatever cultural context we find ourselves. The emphasis in the reading is on the community, something that our culture is losing a sense of with its relentless emphasis on the individual and on individual choice.

The words "call" and "calling" come back four times in the reading. An authentic Christian life, they suggest, is never simply the result of a person setting out, as it were, from ground zero and through his or her own efforts coming to faith. In the biblical tradition, the initiative is always with God. He creates and

intervenes in his creation, he calls individuals like Abraham and Moses, the prophets and David. Jesus is both called and calls. He is entrusted with a mission to proclaim God's love and forgiveness, to offer a vision of human life and human destiny, and to call people to faith.

If we are Catholic Christians today, it is because we were baptized at some point in our lives and have tried to remain faithful to the new relationship with God and others that it began in us. As personal and unique as that relationship was and is, it drew us into a community of people of fellow believers. Together we are the church.

The second paragraph in today's reading focuses on the theme of unity. We were all called, Paul says, to the one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. The ultimate ground of our unity is the oneness of God. There is but one God and we are all part of his creation, members of the universal human family and, within that family, members of the community of those who have been given the grace of an explicit faith in Jesus and in the saving, reconciling, and life-giving power of his death and resurrection.

In the first paragraph of the reading, Paul speaks of the kind of basic attitudes that in his mind flow from our calling to faith and to the community of

faith. I beg you, he says “to live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” The specific things he mentions are all guaranteed to make community life easier, whether it be in the family or the church or in any other form of community. He speaks of humility and gentleness, of patience and of bearing with one another in love. Such things are not easy and yet are necessary if any kind of genuine community life is to flourish.

Finally, Paul says, we should try to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That this is becoming increasingly difficult in our culture is obvious. We are becoming more polarized, more radical in our opposition to those who do not agree with us. For this, there is no easy solution. If we share, however, Paul’s view of what we are called to at the level of our faith and if we can experience something of it in the community of the church, we should be in a position to confront and overcome our tendency to adopt an adversarial attitude to those with whom we disagree.

There is, Paul reminds us, one body, the church, and one Spirit that animates it, and “one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” Made in his image and likeness we are called to live in peace with him and with one another.