

## **PASTORAL COUNCIL**

### **Thoughts For Reflection**

**January 24, 2018**

#### *The Harmony of Unity*

St. Ignatius of Antioch was appointed Bishop by St. Peter. He is one of the five Apostolic Fathers, and he was the first person to use the term “catholic,” in writing, to characterize the universal nature of the Church. He wrote a letter to the Ephesians to describe the right relationship between the members of the Church, the bishops, and the priests.

He began by glorifying Jesus, and then said “You must be made holy in all things by being united in perfect obedience, in submission to the bishop and the presbyters [priests].”

With evident humility, and because he was fully aware of his imperfections, he wrote, “I am not giving you orders as if I were a person of importance”. He asked for support; “It is you who should be strengthening me by your faith, your encouragement, your patience, your serenity.” However, he recognized the need to urge the members “to be united in conformity with the mind of God. For Jesus Christ, our life, without whom we cannot live, is the mind of the Father, just as the bishops, appointed over the whole earth, are in conformity with the mind of Jesus Christ.”

Using the metaphor of a musical instrument, he described the proper relationship of the priests to the bishop. They “are as suited to the bishop as strings to a harp,” and then he encouraged the members, in the same way, to be like a choir “so that, in harmony of sound through harmony of hearts, and in unity taking the note from God, you may sing with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father” so that “at all times you may share in God.”

Note that to St. Ignatius, there can be no harmony where Jesus Christ is absent.

The cruel emperor Trajan condemned Ignatius to death in the Coliseum by wild animals, one of the entertainments of the harsh Roman culture. Ignatius’s church prayed for his release, but he asked them to stop:

“At last I am becoming his disciple. May nothing entice me till I happily make my way to Jesus Christ! Fire, cross, struggles with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs—let them come to me, provided only I make my way to Jesus Christ. I would rather die and come to Jesus Christ than be king over the entire earth. Him I seek who died for us; him I love who rose again because of us.”

Like the Roman citizens, today’s secular culture would condemn him as a madman who deserved whatever he got. May we all aspire to be as mad as St. Ignatius in his love for Jesus and in his desire for unity in the Holy Catholic Church!