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## Fire of Divine Unity: Col 1: 24-7

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## **Fire of Divine Unity:**

**Col 1: 24-7**

By Sr. Pia (Kimberly) St. Romain

**Abstract:** Paul invites all people into a oneness with Christ and each other. It is a requirement in the Christian journey. The Holy Trinity is a communion of persons as One and we as the church are a communion of persons as one body of Christ. It is only by God's Love that we can share in the inner life of the Holy Trinity, participating in a holy intimacy beyond our imagination. This Divine unity with the Holy Trinity and others is made possible through Mary's heart, the Eucharist, and our willingness to undergo unavoidable sufferings for the sake of Christ and the Church just like Paul. The fruit of these transformative difficulties is Christ Himself being revealed in His glory in others. We need Christ in others to be saints and to be able to enkindle the fire of Divine unity in others. Christ needed Mother Mary and so do we. She continually allows the Love and communion of the Holy Trinity to come forth into this world, through her heart, into ours. Mary can help us to be vulnerable to one another as we are in the midst of our suffering. We can become open to being in communion with one another as we endure our afflictions. The death and resurrection of Christ transforms these times of darkness into entrances into the depths of His heart. We become more known by God and others when we can receive God's Love together as one as we suffer. The way to enter into this union is through the gentleness of Mary and the gift of the Eucharist. We are made holy as we relinquish our distrust of God while gently and continually receiving the Eucharist with Mary's openness to Divine Love. As we partake in the Body and Blood of Christ, in communion with our brothers and sisters in Christ, the Resurrection takes place in us. Other people who were also created by God will have a gentle breeze blow the kindling coals in their spirit and they will begin to become alive with this fire of Divine unity. The revelation of God's glory will glimmer as the Kingdom of God unfolds in our midst. The beauty of Holy Communion with God and our brothers and sisters will make any suffering we endured a joy. As Christ needed Mary to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth, so do we need others to help us participate in the Christian life. We need Christ in one another to persevere through the sufferings that befall us on our journey. Paul encourages us with holy encouragement to see the gift of sharing in the Cross of Christ for our brothers and sisters. This Divine unity makes it easy to allow our difficulties to go from bitter to bittersweet as we remain with one another in the mystery of being made holy together. We participate as one body in the Paschal Mystery and the Love of God is made manifest on earth in us.

**Keywords:** Divine unity, Communion, Suffering, Love, Mariology

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## **Possible Significance Today**

Paul wrote with words inspired by God to the Christian community in Colossae to stir the coals of faith within them. These inspired writings were meant to ignite the flames of Divine unity within that community, and the text has the same purpose for us Christians today. This text, Col 1:24-7, shows that the common thread in humanity around the world and throughout time is that we need God in one another. Paul is enkindling in all of us Christ's desire for us to be strengthened in Him and to persevere, so that we may enkindle that same Christ in others. That we need God to help us to be Christians is an eternal message.

Paul reminds us that we cannot be Christians alone. We are one, as the Church, in the person of Christ. Hans Urs von Balthasar describes the Church as a person which is "The ecclesiological concretization of the words of Jesus: 'that they may all be one even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world might believe that thou hast sent me' (Jn 17:21)."<sup>1</sup> Through Paul's writing, the Spirit of God is echoing the prayer of Jesus, by asking us today if we can handle that much intimacy. Are we willing and able to be stirred into the flame of Divine unity as one body?

## **Deepening our Belief**

It may be helpful for us to allow our hearts and minds to be searched by the same Spirit that inspired Paul to write. No one likes to suffer and we avoid it whenever we can. Our life decisions are sometimes based on this, and there is nothing necessarily wrong with avoiding difficulties. Do we believe that there are times that we cannot avoid difficulties? If so, are we willing to accept these when they come to us?

Paul suggests that not only will difficulties come to us, but that we are invited to accept them with joy as he does, because our difficulties can be a means of communion through the sufferings of Christ. Our unavoidable sufferings can be the means of deepening our Christian belief. We are invited to believe deeply in the fruits of Christ's sufferings which can be made manifest

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<sup>1</sup> Stephan Ackermann, "The Church as Person in the Theology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 29, no. 2 (2002): 248-249.

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through us (Jn 6:28-9). Acceptance and belief are the kindling to our sharing in the fire of Divine unity and our transformation into “the hope of glory” (Col 1:27), which is Christ Himself.

### **God’s Revelation of Himself**

"There must be some other way." "Something must be wrong with Paul." If these statements ring true, Saint Anastasius offers some guidance for us to accept this invitation from Paul:

It was necessary for Christ to suffer: his passion was absolutely unavoidable. He said so himself when he called his companions dull and slow to believe because they failed to recognize that he had to suffer and so enter into his glory. Leaving behind him the glory that had been his with the Father before the world was made, he had gone forth to save his people. This salvation, however, could be achieved only by the suffering of the author of our life, as Paul taught when he said that *the author of life himself was made perfect through suffering*.<sup>2</sup>

Paul was given insight into the heart of Christ which so desired that all people would be one. This desire was expressed back then as a Divine unity among Colossians, Jews, and Gentiles. Paul saw this happening and acknowledged that it was the glory of God, which was there before creation, and was made manifest on the cross. The intimacy that Paul could share in with Christ and His Church, and in bringing about this unity, is what gave him cause for rejoicing in his sufferings. Suffering on its own is terrible and without meaning, thus it should be avoided. The sufferings of Christ and Paul, however, are fruitful and joyful, because the glory of God is continually revealed in others because of what Christ and Paul endured. We need only to submit to the revelation of God to us by receiving Christ’s sufferings on the cross in our unavoidable sufferings. If we can let Him love us through it we will come to be known more deeply by Him.

### **Revelation of Church**

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<sup>2</sup> “From a Discourse by Saint Anastasius of Antioch,” *The Liturgy of the Hours: According to the Roman Rite II* (1976): 569.



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The readers of this letter from Paul are the “saints” (Col 1:26) who are the Church. As sharers in the fire of Divine unity, we as the Church are reminded that we are not alone in our faith and are one in the body of Christ. The mother of God offers us help in undergoing this Love as one body. Although we are limited in our ability to enter into communion with the Holy Trinity and with one another, by grace Mary is not. “The Church in her deepest reality is the unity of those who, gathered and formed by the immaculate and therefore limitless assent of Mary, which through grace has the form of Christ, are prepared to let the saving will of God take place in themselves and for all their brothers.”<sup>3</sup> Through the glory of Christ on the cross, and the grace given to Mary, an otherwise impossible endeavor is opened to us. We can accept Paul’s invitation to complete “what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col 1:24). The path to mystical union with Christ and his Church is made clear through the heart of Mary.

We can receive the Holy Spirit in Mary’s “yes,” as we participate in the Paschal Mystery, allowing her to offer our difficulties with Christ’s as means of communion for all people. This new way of living is supported by receiving the Eucharist. The Eucharist transforms our inability to bear fruit in the midst of sufferings, to be able participate in Mary’s radical availability to the work of Love. We are drawn more deeply into union with each other and with God as we are “transformed, [and] become with Christ and in him ‘one organism of self-giving,’ or better, ‘one body, one spirit which gives life,’ [and] it is creation as a whole that continues his Pasch and his metamorphosis.”<sup>4</sup> As the Church, united in Christ, our tenderness and all of creation are continually made new by the Love of God and Mary’s receptivity.

### **Mission Statement**

Paul proudly tells us “Christ in you [is] the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). In other words, Paul is saying ‘I love you.’ His mystical union with Christ allows his spirit to share that message of salvation with us. He and Christ are one heart. Paul is echoing the prayer of Jesus to the Father that we all “would be one” (Jn 17:21). Paul is giving voice to the Love of Christ on the cross. Paul was given a share in the grace given to Mary and because of this Paul can be seen as saying

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<sup>3</sup> Ackermann, “The Church as Person in the Theology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar,” 247.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Pierre Batut, “Believing in the Resurrection, or: The Logic of Love,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 37, no. 1 (2010): 46.

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‘I love you’ to the Church, as he gives voice to Mary’s tender care for Christ and His body. As they received the Spirit of God, bringing about Divine unity in and through the Church, so can we, as we allow the Love of Christ to deepen our belief, underneath our resistance to difficulties. Through Christ in us, we can respond to Paul with, ‘I love you too.’

We are sharers in the mission of Christ, which in its glory was revealed on the Cross. May we allow Christ’s Love poured out for us to enkindle the fire of Divine unity in others, not by our efforts but through our letting go of our desires and entering more deeply into the Paschal Mystery in every moment of our lives.

The Good News of the paschal mystery tells us that it was impossible that he who is Life should not rise. But it also tells us more: his death could not concern him alone; it was a gift for us and for the multitude. This very fact gives us a reason to give thanks for this death—which we do in the Eucharist—and to allow ourselves to be led along the paschal itinerary that makes our life, in all its fallenness, the place of a gift that is similar to his own and that is promised, in its turn, an eternal fruit.<sup>5</sup>

As we rejoice in our sufferings with Paul, we can rest in being of one heart with Christ and His Church as we witness the glory of God coming up in others.

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<sup>5</sup> Batut, “Believing in the Resurrection, or: The Logic of Love,” 46.



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