

# St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church

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**TRADITIONALLY SPEAKING** by S. Casarotto, CS 02/22/09

"May they be one..."

In the third century, the Christian writer Origen observed: "At the beginning Christians were few and of one mind. As soon as they grew in numbers, they began to divide and now everybody wants to form his own group." A century later, as the Arian heresy was spreading throughout the Mediterranean, St. Augustine remarked, "This is the sacrifice of the Christians: though being many we are only one body of Christ." The Bishop of Hippo noted that, when he was preaching on Sunday morning, he could hear the Arian bishop preach his Gospel on the other side of the street! Divisions among Christians are not new. They are a cause of great scandal and suffering. To keep the unity Christ wanted and to build unity is the *sacrifice* of His followers.

In our consumerist society, religion is packaged and repackaged under many brands like any other product. An undefined concept of free-dom is very appealing in our society. Cafeteria Catholics have succumbed to the idea of a self-made Christianity. However, Catholics who are church-shopping already have a troubled relationship with the Church and are looking for an easy way out of their responsibilities as baptized and members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

When Christ talked about the Eucharist, some people expressed disbelief. St. John notes: "As a result of this, many disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied Him" (*Jn. 6, 66*). Jesus did not say, "Come back! Don't take me too seriously! I am inclusive!" In fact, He turned to the Twelve and said: "Do you want to go too?" and He noted: "There are some of you who do not believe."

When the Lord spoke about the lasting unity and exclusivity of conjugal love, some of His disciples objected to it. Jesus did not say, "Don't take me too seriously!" Or "Just go to court and get a divorce!" Or "You can not do it now because the idea is premature. I leave Peter in charge: one day he or his successors may change the rules!" Jesus said clearly: "What God has united, man can not divide!" (*Mk. 10, 11*). In fact, the annulment of a marriage pronounced by the Church tribunal confirms that the Church stands by God's will and reminds us that this is always possible with God's help.

The Lord said: "I am the Truth, the Way and the Life. Follow Me!" He also said, "You have heard... but I tell you..." He did not say "I am one of the many truths, one of the many ways and one of the many lifestyles." In fact, the early Christians were identified as followers of "the new way of life" (*Acts 5, 20*). Jesus said: "I am the Good Shepherd" who leads us to good pastures and protects us against the wolf. He did not say "Choose any shepherd you want." He told us to watch out for the wolves dressed in sheep skins. Certainly Jesus knows there are stray sheep and He welcomes them back. He told us to leave the final judgment to God. However, the Gospel is first of all a message of forgiveness through conversion.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Protestant minister who died in a concentration camp, observed, "Cheap grace means the justification of the sin without the justification of the sinner so everything can remain as it was before." On Judgment Day, it will be God, not man, who will pick and choose.