

TRINITY NEWS

WEEK 03. January 19, 2020. EPIPHANY 2

Yesterday we celebrated the Confession of St. Peter which commemorates Peter's acknowledgement of Christ as the Messiah, an event recorded in each of the synoptic gospels.

This feast is a relatively new one, created in fact, to mark the beginning of the Octave (week) of Prayer for Christian Unity, which ends on the 25th, the date of the much older Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul – the two feasts act as convenient and appropriate book-ends.

For me, this always calls to mind the figure of Bishop Charles Henry Brent, the first Anglican/Episcopalian bishop in the Philippines who, though locally famous for the schools and hospitals he set up here, is more generally known as one of the pioneers of the Ecumenical Movement.

His passion for Christian unity began here in fact, and was rooted in his experience as a missionary. He realized from the start that the existence of so many Christian denominations in competition with each other was to say the least, counterproductive. At the same time, he acknowledged that the issues that divided us were real, and couldn't be glossed over – I wish I still had a copy of the sermon he preached at the inauguration of Union Church here in Manila: he lays his vision out very clearly, as he celebrates the step towards unity that Union Church represents.

His subsequent experience as a military chaplain on the front in World War I only intensified his zeal; he was horrified at the evils of war and became convinced that the only way to a real peace in this world was through Christ, but that way was blocked by our selfish disunity. He spent the rest of his life in pursuit of this goal, and was rewarded by being unanimously elected to preside over the first World Conference on Faith and Unity, the precursor of today's World Council of Churches, in Lausanne in the summer of 1927.

Let me leave you with a quote from one of his sermons to think about during this week.

"The unity of Christendom is not a luxury, but a necessity. The world will go limping until Christ's prayer that all may be one is answered. We must have unity, not at all costs, but at all risks. A unified Church is the only offering we dare present to the coming Christ, for in it alone will He find room to dwell!"