

The Church belongs to Christ



With TV lights glaring in the background, Deacon John Lindsay incenses the congregation during Vespers at the Oct. 21 session of Nothing More Beautiful. Ramon Gonzalez, Western Catholic Reporter

We must strive to maintain and deepen the unity of the Church, Archbishop Richard Smith said at the Nothing More Beautiful series Oct. 21. "If the Church is one, it must be united."

The archbishop called on the faithful to remain close to the pope by union with the local bishop.

"The necessity of staying close to the pope and bishops arises from the nature of the unity we are called to maintain," he said.

The archbishop said the Church is not ours to change. "We do not create the Church, we receive it."

The Church, he stressed, is the Church of Jesus Christ and "not a human institution that can be tinkered with and changed at will."

"We accept it from God and rejoice that he has chosen to draw us into the beauty of its communion by his grace working through the sacraments."

Smith and Julien Hammond, who gave a personal testimony, spoke to an attentive congregation in a packed St. Joseph's Basilica. They addressed the theme, The Church We Believe in is One.

The archbishop urged the faithful to be vigilant regarding any spirit of rebellion that abides in our hearts toward the plan of God, and ask for the grace of its opposite, which is repentance and surrender.

"In other words, what is necessary to maintain the unity of the Church is humble self-awareness and continuous conversion," he said.

In his talk, Smith said maintaining the unity of the Church requires that we “nourish our souls with what is true – the Word of God, the grace of the sacraments, the doctrine of the Church.”

Christians must guard against “the lies and temptations that can separate us from one another,” the archbishop said.

He noted there is great emphasis today on making sure that only healthy food and drink is taken into the body and upon different methods of cleansing the toxins within.

“But we hear very little about what we are taking into our minds, our psyches, our souls,” he lamented.

“In our world today of varied communications media there is a great deal of toxicity. Are we taking the time to consider what is healthy for our souls and what is not? What are we absorbing? What are we reading? What television programs are we watching?”



The congregation at the Oct. 21 Nothing More Beautiful pray and sing during the Vespers service which anchored the two talks. Ramon Gonzalez, Western Catholic Reporter

“What Internet sites draw our attention? What are we doing to remove the toxins? Is there a pattern of regular Confession in my life so that God can bring things to light, heal me with his love and set me on the right, the spiritually healthy, track?”

SIN OF REBELLION

“We should not forget that the sin of rebellion, of disunity, resulted from following the voice of the serpent, the tempter, the evil one; it resulted from believing a lie.

“If we know that God’s will is the Church, that God’s will is unity, we can be certain that the evil one will have as his object the destruction of the Church by attacking her essence, which is her oneness.”

Hammond, director of evangelization and catechesis for the Edmonton Archdiocese, spoke about his deeply felt call to help restore Christian unity.

He grew up in Shaunavon, Sask., the second child and first son of two French Canadian Catholic parents.

"I first learned about Christian unity in the domestic Church of my parents' home – the first school of my faith."

In the family setting, Hammond also learned the stuff of ecumenism: patience, kindness, dialogue, forgiveness and love.

This early education came in handy because Lutherans and United Church people dominated life in Shaunavon.

NEIGHBOURLY ECUMENISM

"Anytime an event was happening in the community people rallied to the cause because it was the neighbourly thing to do," he said. "I think this kind of ecumenism happens a lot on the Prairies, where people don't get caught up in denominational levels."

In his talk, Hammond described himself as somebody who wants to work to improve things in the Church that need improvement.

"In particular, God has put it on my heart to feel deeply what the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls the 'wounds to unity' within the Church," Hammond said.

"It has become the greatest blessing in my life to discover the Lord calling me to pray and work for Christian unity, to become an ecumenist, that is, one who strives after the restoration of unity in the Church."

The next episode in *Nothing More Beautiful* will take place on Thursday, Dec. 9 at 7 p.m. Bishop Douglas Crosby, recently named bishop of Hamilton, Ont., and former national Catholic Women's League president Agnes Bedard will address the theme, *The Church We Believe in is Holy*.