

If you follow pro football, you are aware that there is a playoff game between the Chicago Bears and the Packers of Green Bay, Wisconsin. It is the oldest rivalry in the NFL. And you may also be aware that these two teams do not like each other a whole lot and the two sets of fans aren't in love either.

At a sports bar in Wisconsin this afternoon, you would know what to wear—a cheesehead-- and whom to cheer for. And in Chicago, same way: fans better have a "C" on their hat. A "cheesehead" in a Chicago better have life insurance.

But Illinois and Wisconsin share a border, and there are sports bars there in northern Illinois and southern Michigan that have fans for both teams. In those bars in the middle, fans of the Packers and of the Bears walk in the same door, drink their Pabst Blue Ribbon from the same tap—and they need to get along! (Because there is a big guy at the door named Max!)

Rewind that old VCR two thousand years, and welcome to the great city of Corinth, Greece! (Every two years, Corinth hosted huge athletic games and fans probably drank wine and cheered their favorite runners too.)

Paul visited Corinth in 51 ad, preached Jesus there for maybe 18 months, and left behind him a community of perhaps only 100 members. After Paul moves on, other preachers visit, people like Apollos and possibly St. Peter. And within five years after Paul left Corinth—only 20 years after Jesus' resurrection!—these 100 had

divided up into factions. Apollos was an inspiring preacher, so some of them wore Apollos T-shirts. Peter would have been more law-oriented, so a faction followed him. Some wore St. Paul T-shirts; they like Paul's freedom from the law. And there were jerseys that said, "I belong to Christ (and you don't)!" 100 baptized Christians, Jesus living in each of them, and what do we find? Rivalries, dissension. Paul knows that if that continues, next is blaming, breakup: people find a better community, or start their own.

Remember those bars in the middle—in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois? That's the Church's job: not to force anyone to agree, but to sit together in the same room and drink from the same "divine tap": Jesus Christ. And so we don't have the 5:00 pm for the Tea Party and the 9:00 for the Republicans and the 11:00 for the Democrats. Catholic churches don't have reserved pews for people who are devoted to MSNBC, or Fox News, or NPR. We don't have one section for folks who think priests ought to "lay down the law and just tell people what's right and wrong" and a different section for people who want to hear again that Jesus loves them, forgives them, and is with them.

Here at St. Bernadette, we are fortunate to have one entrance for everyone, one Baptismal Pool, one Gathering Space; and of course one Lord, one Savior, one Jesus who is in each of us. We turn to our neighbor and say, "Peace be with you" even if they have a completely different view about health care, gun regulation, war, or anything else. "The Christ in me greets the Christ in you!"

It was hard for the Church in Corinth, and hard for us too. But what a witness to our very polarized country if all 18,000 Catholic parishes were living proof that differences and respect can live together in the same room.

Well, Bears and Packers fans, enjoy the game, don't drink too much Pabst, and behave yourselves. And remember that under those different jerseys, you are all brothers and sisters.