

If you're taking a teenager shopping for athletic shoes, there's a good chance they're going to want PUMA or adidas. Both brands are popular now among young people. But most teens probably don't realize that by choosing one over the other they are, in a way, choosing sides in a family dispute that goes back over eighty years.

In the early 1920's Adolf Dassler started manufacturing running shoes in Germany and named the shoes after himself: adidas. His older brother Rudolf came to work for him. But by 1948, the brothers had grown sick of each other. Rudolf left to start a rival company which he named RUDA; soon, he changed the name to PUMA. Ever since, adidas and PUMA have been competing for the same customers with similar products.

From one point of view, you might say that things worked out well in this brotherly dispute. Two large, international companies grew out of their rivalry. But Adi and Rudolf never reconciled. They evidently remained bitter for the rest of their lives, and it's safe to assume that their bitterness was passed down to their children. Besides, as successful as adidas and PUMA are separately, how much more successful might they have been as a single entity, pooling the creative energies of both brothers and their families?

Things work better when brothers get along. King David wrote, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1) He knew from experience how awful family quarrels can be: his own son Amnon was murdered by another one of his sons: Absalom. That's the most extreme example of a sibling rivalry.

But rivalries of a lesser nature can plague families - and congregations, too. When sinful, selfish people are intent on furthering their sinful, selfish agendas, the true work of the church gets left behind. It makes each of us examine our hearts and our desires for our congregation. Do we want what is best for furthering the kingdom of God, or do we want what would make us most comfortable? Pastors are hardly immune from this kind of temptation; neither are the people in the pews.

There is a cure for this plague: unity. David describes the fruits of unity as "good and pleasant." God blesses this unity because he is the one who creates this unity. He reminds us of our common faith, faith in him who saved us through his death on the cross. He points us ahead to a common mission: to reach the lost with the only message that saves. He promises us a common future: an eternity with him in heaven.

When brothers can't get along, that rivalry fuels every thought and every action. Everything is selfish. But with the unity that God provides in Jesus, brothers - and sisters - can move forward together. Bonded by love. Energized with purpose. Eager for the future.

Prayer: Lord, you have united me to my fellow believers in my congregation and synod. Thank you for the faith we share. Use us collectively to do your will here on earth. May you receive the glory for everything. In Jesus' name,
Amen.

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