

## Sermon for January 27, 2019 – The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

### 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (NIV84)

Theme: **You are the body of Christ.**

*<sup>12</sup> The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. <sup>14</sup> Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. <sup>19</sup> If they were all one part, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, but one body. <sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, <sup>24</sup> while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, <sup>25</sup> so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. <sup>26</sup> If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. <sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

Do you know what an autoimmune disease is? Basically described, it's when a person's own immune system attacks some part of his own body, considering it a threat. Some autoimmune diseases are mild, while others are life threatening. Regardless of the case, it is never good when the body attacks itself.

We all belong to the body of Christ. Even though we differ from each other, we have all been chosen by the same heavenly Father, redeemed through the sacrifice of the same Son, baptized and sealed with the same Spirit, and united into one body through faith in the same Gospel.

It is, therefore, never a good thing when members of Christ's body attack other members. It is never good when they ignore them. It is never good when a member feels out of place or tries to cut off his/her ties to the body. When such things happen, the whole-body hurts, becomes sick and is endangered.

The devil knows how dangerous Christians united as one are to his schemes. This is why he stops at nothing to try to destroy Christian unity – often enlisting the aid of our own personal pride and selfishness to sow seeds of discontentment and division in the Church.

Let us, therefore, pay close attention to the Holy Spirit's encouragement - applying it to our hearts as we learn to appreciate our God-given differences, under the theme: **you are the body of Christ.** May the Holy Spirit use this fact to guide our actions and emotions towards one another – rejoicing in the blood bought unity we share in Jesus.

Our text begins: <sup>12</sup> *The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.* <sup>13</sup> *For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

What a beautiful analogy – one that is carried throughout the New Testament: we are the body of Christ. Look at yourself for a moment: do you see how each finger is different, how your palm does not resemble your elbow, and your toes are different than your nose. Diversity exists throughout your body, and yet each part does not exist on its own, but is united to make you who you are.

The same is true regarding the Church. We all have different strengths, weaknesses, talents, struggles and life experiences. Not a single one of us is alike, and yet we have been united together by God himself. How? First of all, He saved us from our sins through his Son's life, death and resurrection. Then, through the Word and Baptism, he created faith in our hearts and sealed us as his own – as the Apostle Paul says elsewhere: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,* <sup>27</sup> *for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*" (Galatians 3:26-28, NIV84)

Our text continues: <sup>14</sup> *Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.* <sup>15</sup> *If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.* <sup>16</sup> *And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.*

There are times when we may be tempted to wonder whether or not we really "belong" in our congregation because we think differently than others. "Everyone seems to like traditional music, but I like contemporary. Do I really belong here? Everyone seems to support one political party, but I support the other. Do I really belong here? Everyone seems to focus on the importance of outreach, while I think there needs to be greater in-reach. Do I really belong here?"

If you are tempted to think that you are so different in your way of thinking and the gifts God has given you that you wonder whether or not you belong here; let me say this: I thank God you are different. If you were the same as everyone else, what benefit would that be to the body of Christ? St. Paul puts it this way:

<sup>17</sup> *If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?* <sup>18</sup> *But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.*

If everyone thought the same way, where would the checks and balances be? If everyone was a non-emotional, rational thinker, how would we be able to express our joy in the Gospel? If everyone was emotional, who would bring reason to our meetings? If everyone had a strong faith, who would there be to encourage?

It's because you are different that you belong to the body of Christ. God has made you unique – so that you can contribute something to the Church that no one else can. And if you were to leave the congregation because you are different? Then everyone suffers and is the worse for it! Rejoice in who you are and how different you are from others. Rejoice, also in the fact that your brothers and sisters in Christ are different from you – even if you feel these differences getting on your nerves. Rejoice, because they are God's gifts to serve the whole. God gave them to compliment and complete you.

<sup>20</sup> *As it is, there are many parts, but one body.* <sup>21</sup> *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"* <sup>22</sup> *On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,* <sup>23</sup> *and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty,* <sup>24</sup> *while our presentable parts need no special treatment.*

Remember what I said about autoimmune diseases - when the body attacks the body? It is never a good thing. And neither is it when we are tempted to think ill of our fellow brothers and sisters in the faith – acting as if we don't need them.

Each member of this congregation is important – even those who have not been coming regularly to hear God's Word. They are not “hopeless” as frustrated Church leaders might be tempted to describe them, thinking that they have fallen from faith. The reality is that many of them are hurting members of the body who are sad, suffering or being led away into sin by Satan. Instead of complaining about them, we should try to figure out why they are weak – doing what we can to lovingly help and restore these members before it does become too late.

Paul makes an interesting analogy with parts of the body that are weaker but are actually indispensable. Think of your inner organs. They are weak and need the protection of the ribcage, abdominal muscles and skin. These organs, even though they are hidden and protected by the rest of the body, are essential for the body's life. I think of some of the shut-ins who, though not seen by many of us, have a lot of time to pray, and, in fact, do pray for the Church before God. Even members who are hurting and straying are indispensable to us. They allow other members to show compassion, encouragement and admonition; just like a cut toe allows the body's immune system to accomplish its purpose.

There are parts of the human body whose function we have no knowledge of. An example would be the appendix or the tonsils. Does this mean that they do nothing? No. Recent science understands that they still have a purpose, and are no longer described as unnecessary. The same is true regarding a member of the Church who seems to be doing nothing. Just because someone seems to be doing nothing, doesn't mean he is not important. Maybe he is still waiting for his purpose to come. Maybe he is still trying to figure out the gifts God has given him. Maybe the LORD is using him in a way that is only known to Him – and that we will never know.

*But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, <sup>25</sup> so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. <sup>26</sup> If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*

God has combined our bodies in such a way that when our tooth aches, the muscles in our head will begin to hurt, our stomachs will start to grumble, our hands will grab our jaw, and our feet will bring us to the dentist. The same is true in Christ's church: when one of us hurts, God wants all of us to be anxious for that person - willing to pray and help in whatever possible way we can.

At the same time, if you were to compliment one of my daughters on how pretty her eyes are, you would probably see her whole face light up with a smile, her hands clasp together in happiness and her feet bringing her to her family in order to tell us about the wonderful compliment she has received. In the same way, when one member is honored, the whole body of Christ should rejoice with him. If one area of the congregation's ministry is complimented, then the whole Church should rejoice, because we are all united in Christ, to whom all glory and honor belong.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: *you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.* Divine Word needs you. Jesus wants you to be a part of himself and his work of saving the lost. Are you tempted to think that you have nothing to offer this congregation? You do! Even if your gifts or ideas lie in a totally different area than one that the congregation is currently pursuing, let them be known. Tell them to your councilmen or pastor. Who knows – maybe your hidden gifts are exactly what the congregation needs to help us share and encourage each other in Christ,

And, leaders in the Church: let us make sure that we don't blow off other people's ideas, just because they don't match our vision for the Church. I am not saying that we do this, but I know all too well how my own selfish, sinful nature wants to do that at times – without my realizing it! Rather, rejoice in the fact that members are willing to share their ideas with you. Compare them with Scripture and, if they prove to be God pleasing, let us consider their possible place in our ministry. Christ's body is big and inclusive. There is a lot of diversity among its members. At the same time, the Holy Spirit has united us in doctrine and faith as one body, whom our Savior himself directs and leads – all to the glory of his name.

We all need each other. Let us find ways to foster love and care for each other. Let us work together as one body: the body of Christ – for, by the grace of God, this exactly who we are! Amen.