

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Theme: You are the body of Christ.

¹² *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.* ¹³ *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.* ¹⁴ *Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.* ¹⁵ *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.* ¹⁶ *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.* ¹⁷ *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?* ¹⁸ *But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.* ¹⁹ *If they were all one part, where would the body be?* ²⁰ *As it is, there are many parts, but one body.* ²¹ *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!"* ²² *On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,* ²³ *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,* ²⁴ *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,* ²⁵ *so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.* ²⁶ *If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.* ²⁷ *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

Have you ever heard of autoimmune diseases? The best way to describe them is this: your own body attacks itself – thinking it is the enemy. Some autoimmune diseases are mild, others are life threatening – but regardless of the case, it is never healthy or good when the body attacks itself.

We are the body of Christ. Different though we are, we all have been called by the same Gospel and washed clean from our sins through faith in the same Savior. We have been chosen by the same God, baptized and sealed with the same Spirit, and united into one body – the Church.

It is never good 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 and tries to cut off his/her ties to the body. When such things happen, the whole body feels it, becomes sick and is placed in danger.

We are the body of Christ! Let us rejoice in this fact and use it to guide our actions and emotions toward one another – realizing the unity we share in Jesus.

Our text begins: ¹² *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.* ¹³ *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, responsibilities and life experiences. Not a single one of us is alike, and yet we have been united together by God himself. He called us from our sinful, selfish way of life and united us together through faith in Christ. How so? First of all by saving 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 Paul says elsewhere: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,* ²⁷ *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)

¹⁴ Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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.

Sometimes we are tempted to look at other members in the Church and think: "Well, I wonder if I really belong here because I am not like everyone else. Most people here like traditional music and I like contemporary." Truth be told, I have seen people leave churches for lesser things than this. But such thinking is sad and wrong.

If you are tempted to think this way, tempted to think that you are too different in your way of thinking and the gifts God has given you that you don't belong here, first of all 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:

¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ 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 were rational, where would we find our joy? 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 body 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 others are different than you and in the gifts God gave them to serve the whole.

²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²¹ 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!" ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ 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, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment.

Remember when I mentioned autoimmune diseases, when the body attacks the body? It is never a good thing. And neither is it in the Church when we are tempted to think that we don't need each other.

Each member of this congregation is important – "even those who have not been coming regularly to hear God's Word and receive His sacrament, and who seem to contribute very little to the congregation. There is no such thing as "dead wood" in the Church. The reality is that there are many members of the body who are sad, suffering or being led away into sin by Satan. We should not complain about them. Rather, as a body, we need to help and restore these members before it is too late.

Paul makes an interesting analogy with parts of the body that are weaker but are actually indispensable. Think of your inner organs that no one sees, not even you yourself. 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 is seeing that they still have a purpose, and are no longer described as unnecessary. The same is true regarding a member of the Church who seem 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 God 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,²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.²⁶ 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 a tooth aches, our whole head hurts, our stomachs grumble, our hands want to do something to help and our feet go to a dentist. The same is true for the Church. When one of us hurts, God wants all of us to be anxious for that person, willing to help in whatever possible way we can. When one of us is going through a difficult time, all of us should be praying and offering our help.

At the same time, if you were to compliment a woman on how pretty her eyes looked, her whole face will begin to shine. Her arms might start swinging and her feet seem to be lighter. Her heart might even pound a little faster. In the same way, when one of us is honored, all of us should rejoice with him. If one area of the Church's ministry is complimented, then all of the Church should rejoice with it because every member is a part of the body of Christ.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: *you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.* Immanuel needs you. Jesus wants you to be a part of himself and his work of saving the lost. Do you think that you have nothing to offer this Church? 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. If you want to organize some project that would benefit the Church, let these ideas be known. Not every idea might be able to be acted on right away, but who knows: you may have something to contribute to the Church that no one else has ever thought of.

And leaders in the Church: let us make sure that we don't blow ideas or people off, just because they don't match our vision for the Church. To do such would be akin to the head telling the hand: "I don't need you." Rather, rejoice in their ideas and willingness to share them. Compare them with Scripture and, if God pleasing, consider them – even if the ideas are something we are not comfortable with doing personally. Christ's body is big and inclusive. There is a lot of diversity among members, but when led by Christ we are harmonized into a beautiful body through which our Savior proclaims His glory through its many workings.

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 this is who we are! Amen.