

OUR WONDERFUL BODY

1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26-27

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you;” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you” And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

In the name of Jesus, the Son of God and our Savior, dear fellow Christians:

Do you want to try something truly amazing? Reach out and take the hymnal from the rack in front of you. That action doesn't seem like anything special, but it really is. It takes the coordinated efforts of many different body parts. First, our eyes zero in on the object. The brain then sends out electrical impulses which travel to muscle groups and make them contract, which causes the arm to reach out. The hand closes around the book. Even the little ridges on our fingertips play a role and help the fingers keep a firm grip. At the same time, the heart automatically speeds up slightly, and our respiration increases to supply the body with the extra blood and oxygen it needs. The whole process takes only a few seconds. We sit, we stand, we grab things, we put things down, we walk and run. We think, write, and speak, all with the same body. Our bodies make computers and the most complicated machines look like Tinker Toy projects assembled by a two-year-old.

The closer we look at our bodies, the more it is impressed upon us that they cannot possibly be the product of a chance, evolutionary process. They are a magnificent creation of God. David writes in Psalm 139: “*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well*” (Psalm 139:14 NIV).

St. Paul uses the human body as an illustration of another wonderful body also created by God. He says, “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.” That body is the Holy Christian Church, the group of all believers everywhere. The closer we look at that body, the more we appreciate just how amazing it is. Let’s see how we fit into it and praise God for making us a part of it.

I.

Our bodies have hundreds of different parts, things like bones, muscles, and internal organs. The Church does too. Paul speaks of Jews and Greeks, slave and free. The Corinthian congregation was made up of people with different ethnic backgrounds and varied social and economic status. Jesus came for all people. The Father told Him: “*It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob...I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth*” (Isaiah 49:6 NIV). And so Jesus preached to His own countrymen, but also to a Samaritan woman. He invited the religious leaders to believe in Him, but also offered salvation to despised tax collectors.

Look at the church today. Believers come in all kinds of different shapes and sizes. We have different backgrounds, ages, income levels, and interests right here in our congregation. And there are even greater differences when we look beyond these walls. There are fellow believers in Nigeria and India who live in a totally different culture. They don’t do things at all like we do. They don’t look or dress as we do. There are Christians of every race. Some are well off, some dirt poor, some in between. The Lord’s kingdom is open to all. He says, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28 NIV). No matter who you are or what your past has been, the promise is the same: “*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool*” (Isaiah 1:18 NIV).

But wouldn’t it be even better if everyone were alike? God could stamp out every Christian with the same heavenly cookie cutter. We would all think alike and do everything in exactly the same way. There are church groups which make a point of planting congregations which are intended to be made up of people who are as much alike as possible, for example, all middle class families with children. They see that model as the ideal.

But the Church is like the body, one body made up of many different members. You don’t see giant eyeballs or ears walking around. So, too, the Church is made up of many different people with many different gifts and talents from the Holy Spirit. Some are

able to teach, organize, or lead. Others have musical gifts or depth of spiritual insight or abilities to work with their hands.

With all the differences, what holds us together? Our physical bodies are joined together by bones and tendons, but we don't have a natural connection with one another or with God. We are self-centered and quick to find fault with others. We were enemies of God who wanted to go our own way, even though it was a course heading toward eternal destruction.

But then Christ joined us to Himself and to one another by becoming one of us and taking away the sin that kept us apart. He gave us His holy life in place of our lives marred by sin. He gave us peace with God by taking God's anger on Himself on the cross. In Baptism the Spirit gave us all the blessings Jesus won for us. In that way we share the greatest bond of all. *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."* [v.13] We are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, along with every other believer.

It is an amazing body! It is worth appreciating and caring for. Instead of thinking only of ourselves, may we cherish all the members of the body. Instead of ignoring, looking down on, or resenting those who are different, may we rejoice that the Spirit has joined them with us in Christ's body, the Holy Christian Church.

II.

Our physical body is so wonderful, because even though it has many parts, they all work together, and each one is important. Doctors used to think that things like the tonsils and appendix were just extra, expendable parts of the body. Now they know that they serve important functions too. God intends the body parts to work together for the good of the whole. The foot doesn't decide to go off on its own. The ear doesn't become jealous because it is not an eye. They need one another. The eye needs the hand to remove a speck of dust from it. The hand needs the feet to take it across the room to pick up the newspaper.

But sometimes, because of sin, there are problems. The immune system attacks the body instead of protecting it. The arms and legs don't do what the brain wants them to because of disease. Sin can cause similar problems in the body of the Church. In Corinth gifts of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues were being coveted and misused. Some were using the Lord's Supper as a display of personal wealth, while their fellow believers went home hungry. The congregation had disintegrated into cliques, each with its own favorite pastor.

Satan still tries to destroy the Church from within that way. He would like us to think of our gifts and talents as our own personal possession to use for our individual glory, instead of for the good of the body. What happens then is that each individual has his own plan and agenda for the church, and if that is not followed, he becomes offended and withdraws from the group.

What we want to remember is that the church is God's creation and designed to serve Him, not our own pride. "*But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.*" [v.18] Each one is needed and interconnected. "*If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*" [v.26] If a toe develops a blister, the rest of the body knows and compensates to help the toe heal. If a member of Christ's body is grieving the loss of a loved one, or wrestling with an especially difficult temptation, or is experiencing persecution, the rest of the body will want to help in any way possible. When fellow Christians rejoice over new souls brought to faith or dedicate a new church building or begin a new mission, we celebrate with them.

Our model and motivation is our Head, Jesus. He humbled Himself and became the servant of all to save all. His love now moves us to love and serve Him. We are His arms and legs to preach the good news to all creation. As He went everywhere warning people about sin and their need for repentance, so we want to reach out wherever we can with the same warning before it is too late. Above all, we want to tell everyone that Jesus is the Light of the world.

Each of us has an important part in that work. Fulltime pastors and teachers have the assignment to train and prepare God's people for works of service. They provide the spiritual tools necessary to witness for Christ. Other leaders like Council and board members help plan and organize the church's efforts. Every member is needed to carry out the Lord's work as effectively as possible. Sunday School teachers, church cleaners, organists, members who invite friends to worship, children who learn God's Word, senior citizens who have faithfully served the Lord for decades and still pray daily for the Church—all are vital to the health of the body.

Do you see the picture? Christ's body is a living, active body, of which you are an important part. Never think that you have nothing to offer or that you won't be missed, because someone else will pick up the slack. Take a personal inventory of the gifts God has given you. Ask a fellow believer what gifts he or she sees in you. Then when you see an opportunity to get involved, when rides are needed to church, when there is a call for teachers, when someone could use Christian encouragement, say, "Lord, here am I! Use me in Your service."

The Lord has blessed us with many gifts. What if each of us put them all to work? What if we used every opportunity to share our faith with those around us? What if we each prayed regularly for the growth of Christ's kingdom? What if we got to work with all the power and energy God offers through His Word. The possibilities are limitless! The potential for God to accomplish great things is mind-boggling! By God's grace we are the body of Christ: many parts, but one body; many parts, but each one is needed.

By the Spirit's power may we wholeheartedly work together as one under the direction, and to the glory of our Head, Jesus Christ. Amen.

—**Pastor Michael M. Eichstadt**