

The Body of Christ
Homily of January 25, 2004
by Fr. Brian Timoney

The passage from the Letter to the Corinthians that we heard just a few moments ago leaves out one of the great classic themes of St. Paul. And that is the unity of the Christian people in Christ. Paul tells us that the Church to which we belong is an organic unity, a body. Now, as members of this body, we are related, not just to some idea or an ideal, for example, protecting the environment; we are related to a person. The body we belong to is not a human organization. It is the body of Christ Himself. In another letter, the one he wrote to the Colossians, Paul makes it very clear that it is only through our connection to the head, Jesus Christ, that the body can really operate and be healthy. Jesus Himself stressed this when He said, "I am the vine and you are the branches. Cut off from Me, you can do nothing." You know from your own personal experience that relationships give you tremendous energy and motivation. There is just nothing that you would not do for someone whom you love. Relationship based on love is the great strength in human life. And the realization that we belong to the Body of Christ, that we have that relationship, indeed the realization that we ARE the Body of Christ focuses our spiritual energies in a very very powerful way.

Paul goes on to draw the obvious conclusion that, if you have a relationship with Christ, then you have a relationship with all others who have a similar bond with Him. I alone do not make up the Body of Christ. I am only a very small part of it. However reluctantly, I too have to accept that you are part of the Body of Christ, indeed that you might very well be a far more important part. Paul emphasizes that each one of us has an important contribution to make to the health of His Body and that, however insignificant our contribution may appear to us, it is absolutely vital to the overall health of the Body of Christ. Now, St. Paul is not in this passage (And I hope you will read the entire passage. We just had a summary of it today.) just talking about the nature of the human body and the nature of the Church. I believe that he is urging us to have a certain attitude, an attitude of openness, of cooperation, interdependence, partnership, a realization that we cannot go it alone, that we should work together, suffer together, rejoice together, cooperate joyfully in building up this Body of Christ that we call "Church." And it is this vision of Paul that lies behind that great document, arguably the most important document that came from the Second Vatican Council, in Latin called "Lumen Gentium," the Light of the Nations. And in this document, the Council used the phrase "The People of God" to describe the Church.

You might very well say, "What's the big deal about that?" Well, it was a big deal forty years ago because really this was the first time this was used to describe the Church. Many of you will remember when we thought of the Church as the Pope away up here and then some Cardinals and some Bishops and some priests and then down at the bottom, all of you. The Vatican Council changed that whole concept, our whole way of thinking about Church. It really flowed

out of this passage of Paul. The Church is not a pyramid. It is you. It is me. It is all of us working together. It is one body.

The most basic expression of Paul's vision of the Body of Christ is right here at parish level. Here your talents are needed. Your full participation is essential if the Body of Christ is to be more than just a shadow, if it is to be made truly visible in our world. We had a marvelous example of the Body of Christ being made visible in your response to the need for the toys for the children of Oakley and blankets and sheets and pillows and so on for the homeless shelter. The response was overwhelming! Now, no single individual in this community could have done that. It was this community, as a body, recognizing that other people, those people in need, were also the Body of Christ. It was this community recognizing that in clothing the naked, we were clothing Christ. It was this community that worked these miracles. It was the Body of Christ in action.

The Body of Christ here at parish level has many parts, many organized parts. There is Parish Council, committees for liturgy and finance, Eucharistic ministers, lectors, altar servers, education ministry, youth ministry, choirs, all kinds of people, spiritual care for the sick.... Do you recognize this yellow pamphlet? I hope you do because this is Christ the King, Body of Christ. These little pamphlets (They're available in the rectory. There are some out in the lobby there as well.) list all the various ministries in the parish, all the ways that the body works together to express the presence of Christ in our world today. There is need for everyone, but we are not motivated just by need, but rather by a real belief that we are truly one in this Body of Christ. And it is our weekly Eucharist that really expresses that unity in its fullest, and best nourishes this Body. And every body needs nourishment. It is here that we receive the Body of Christ in order to become more fully the Body of Christ. It is here that we receive the spiritual nourishment that we all need. This, this is the very heart of the Body, the body that we call "Church." This gathering for Eucharist is Christ the King Parish, Body of Christ. Amen.