

THE AMAZING THING WE CALL; THE BODY

In the opening words of Saint Luke's Gospel, he gives an explanation about why he is writing his gospel account. From the vantage point of two thousand years we can readily accept and believe that Luke's Gospel is an inspired account. Luke's Gospel, we believe, is God's Word. God's Word to us. God's Word for us. So it is not at all surprising for us to say things like "God spoke to the people of Israel" or "God spoke to the first Christians." And we have a lot of those words written down.

BUT. Under closer scrutiny what we believe is not just that God SPOKE to us, spoke to his people—BACK THEN. But we do not believe only in a God who spoke to us—once upon a time—but in a God who speaks to us—in the here and now. SO, ask yourself if you believe that God actually does speak to people in the 21st century. If you do so believe, then do you believe that God will speak to you—directly or indirectly—in your actual life? Or is it just to other people? Because God does so speak—and to very ordinary people.

Sometimes though we hear God speak a word to our hearts through the Scriptures we hear at Mass. God speaks a word that touches us. For example, in today's second reading, from the Epistle of Saint Paul to the people at Corinth. Corinth was a thriving seaport community, full of life—and corruption—and full of the latest news, gossip, ideas and religions. And there were a lot of different viewpoints. Some of that carried into the newly begun Christian community. Factions within the Church existed back then and they exist still today.

So how does Saint Paul try to address the issue of factions? He uses an analogy, and example. He draws from the average person's knowledge of his or her own body.

There is actually some humor. He takes various parts of the body—a hand, a foot, an eye, an ear—and he speaks about how each has its place but each is different. The body needs what each body part gives. They are designed to work together for the good of the whole body. So Paul uses the image with regard to the Christian community. WE are the Body of Christ. We are all different, all necessary to the overall well-being of the Body of Christ.

If we are criticizing each other, attacking each other, trying to make each person be exactly the same as we are it will not be good for the body. To push the analogy a bit farther, that kind of dissension in the body is precisely what happens to our individual body when disease enters or infection or malfunction. A couple years back when I had a bout of vertigo during the 515 Mass, I ended up in the hospital and after some physical therapy I was rid of the vertigo and back to my normal routine. But I learned that my balance is a result of my vision and my inner ear working together. The dizziness occurs when the eye and the ear send contradictory messages to the brain and the brain tries to figure things out. I was given exercises to do which brought the eye and the inner ear back into harmony. I had my balance restored to me.

There had been a malfunction of my sight and hearing. There are all kinds of malfunctions that can—and do—occur in the human person from time to time. Arthritis is one. Diabetes is one. Celiac disease is one. These are autoimmune diseases. The body's defense system gets confused and it begins to malfunction. It attacks what is not an enemy. Even though the whole purpose of the immune system is to protect the person's body from unjust and improper intruders. So Celiac disease, which runs in my family, reacts strongly to the presence of gluten, a protein found in various kinds of wheat, barley or rye. The presence of gluten in that person triggers an auto-immune response that attacks the lining of the small intestine, damaging the lining which then prevents the intestine from absorbing the nutrients from the proteins. They pass through unabsorbed. The body does not get its proper nourishment.

What does this mean for us? If the parts of the body start attacking each other and malfunctioning, then the body will suffer. And when the members of the Body of Christ are "at" each other a lot, or attacking each other, or criticizing each other, or judging each other or condemning each other; or when the members attack the Head and start to claim that the head is not "my head" then the Body of Christ is in trouble. That's the message of the Lord, that's the Word of the Lord to us—to you and me—today. Are we really listening? Or do we hear this as about something that was going on two thousand years ago?

How are you doing? Are you very critical right now of some members of the Church? Condemnatory of them? Feeling justified in judging them because of what they have done or views they hold is Our Lord saying to you and me today? Have you made being a member of the Body of Christ your first priority or is it somewhere down the line? Are you pretty content with pointing the finger at what is wrong with the other guy rather than trying to work at finding some common ground, recognizing that we all do believe in Christ—but are at different places/

How do we resolve this? In communion with Our Lord who welcomes us all, even with our different sins, to be fed at his table—not because we are worthy of the Eucharist but because we need it. We all need it. Come to the table to be fed. Find common ground with those who come to be fed. It is what the Lord is saying—in 2022.