

My Dear people of God,

I would like to devote this column to our second reading today from St Paul to the Corinthians. This reading is a continuation from last Sunday's (second reading). St Paul introduces the analogy of the body with its constituent parts. The human body is one entity though composed of different parts. In the same way the Church, though composed of many members with different roles and gifts forms one body, the body of Christ. Each of us, individual Christians is a member of the body of Christ and each one of us has his or her role to play within the body. Some of them more prominent than others, but all of them very important.

Today in modern medicine there is so much specialization that the body tends to be broken up into parts which then constitute a specialization. Some doctors for example specialize in the heart, others kidneys, feet etc. While this specialization is good, it can have a down side if the specialists do not recognize that their area is part of the whole! I recall when my father was sick (battling a combination of heart issues and diabetes) there was the challenge of contradictions from his doctors. The heart doctor would say, don't do this and that, don't take this medicine or that and this would be contradicted by other specialists.

The human body forms a unity even though it is composed of many parts. Those parts are different from one another and each of them has different functions. Some are undoubtedly more important than others. However, the body needs all its parts and it goes without saying that the parts also need the body. No part can survive on its own.

Using this wonderful image, St Paul tells us that this is how it is with the Church, the body of Christ. Though there are many of us, we form one body in Christ. By means of our baptism we have become members of the **Body of Christ, the Church**. Therefore, there can be no such a thing as an isolated Christian. That is one of the reasons why it is important for us gather together as the body of Christ. From time to time, we meet people who say, I don't need to go to Church, my faith is between me and my God. That is falsehood.

Just as the parts of the body need each other, so much so do we need each other and the Church needs all of us. We need to have a sense of belonging to one another and to Christ. And more importantly, we need to know our role and to get involved even when we would rather just sit back and look after ourselves.

The benefits of belonging to a community far outweigh the drawback. We are all familiar with the illustration of the reeds. Individually, they are weak and easily broken. But tie a bundle of them together, they are virtually unbreakable. So it is with us. Great strength results from togetherness. People take courage from knowing each other, encouraging each other and from standing together. Great things can be done when people work together.

This message is not original to Paul. Jesus Himself taught it, only that instead of the image of the body, He used the image of the vine and its branches. It is another simple but profound illustration of unity and interdependence. It is obvious that the branches need the vine. But the vine also needs the branches, because it is the branches that produce or bear the fruits.

This is how Jesus wanted it to be between Him and his disciples. And this is the way He wants it to be between Him and us. He is the vine, we are the branches or to use St Paul's image, Jesus is the head of the body, we are the limbs. Without a sense of belonging together, and of caring for one another and being responsible for one another, one is not really and fully a Christian.

The fruit that Jesus most desires from us is the fruit of unity. By this the world will know that we belong to Him- by the bond that exists between us and the care we show for one another.

A question for us to reflect on therefore is: What is my part or role in the body of Christ?

Thanks and God bless,

Fr Simon Peter