

Perhaps one of the hardest things we ever do as humans, is precisely what we see Jesus doing in our gospel this morning/evening. If you recall, last week while in the synagogue, Jesus was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled it, found a particular spot and read aloud: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”* Then He said, “Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Many of Jesus' fellow townspeople and neighbors were amazed at what he said; but they also scoffed: "Hey, isn't he the carpenter's son?" What they were thinking was, "how could a guy like that, possibly be the anointed one, our Messiah?" Well, Jesus quickly reassured them that He was indeed not just **their** Messiah." He made it abundantly clear in his follow up, which we hear today, that the fulfillment he brings to Isaiah's messianic prophecy, is **not just** for good Jews like them, but for those who were not even among God's chosen people.

The closest comparison I can make to this outrage, would be akin to you waiting for your tax refund. Yes, your tax refund. But imagine, this year, the IRS sends a letter along *with* your “refund” explaining that (in order to try to jumpstart the economy, again) you’re only receiving *half* of what Uncle Sam owes you, and that the other half is going to your neighbor on welfare who hasn’t worked or even looked for work for over a year. I don’t know about you, but I’d be ready to throw Tea Party or two. But this was, in principle, what Jesus told his fellow Jews in the synagogue; that the Messiah, promised by God to his chosen people Israel, was going to devote his life and ministry to many others (pagans mostly) as opposed to just them. No wonder they were ready to throw Jesus off a cliff. But Jesus stood his ground; and slipped through their midst.

Jesus did one of the hardest things we are asked to do as humans by God; *to be who we really are*. However, God not only asks that of us as humans, but also as Christians. So, as fellow Christians, who are we really? Well, we've heard it time and time again, but unfortunately, that probably means we still don't get it. Simply put, we are Christ's body and individually parts of it. The challenge then, is to *be* that body, to be as Jesus was "a light in the darkness, freedom for the captive and oppressed, sight for the blind, healing for the sick," both physically and spiritually.

And as a body, St. Paul reminds us that we must act as Christ's Body ***together in solidarity***, and with love. We cannot be Christ's body, nor can we love, without one another. It's simply impossible. However, when you consider the divisions and alienation among people even within Christianity, such an ideal itself, can seem an utter impossibility. Obviously, no parish or church is also without its divisions and struggles.

Yet, Paul was keenly aware of this. The Corinthian community to which Paul was writing stood out as a particular divisive and cantankerous lot. But Paul had the vision to see that God had brought those people together into one body. And so he reminded them that no matter their individual gifts, unless they had love, those gifts and their use meant nothing.

“Now you **are** the body of Christ,” he reminded them, “God has so constructed the body so that there may be no division in the body.” Maybe it was his way of saying to the Corinthians and to us, “You don’t like someone in the church? Don’t be mad at *them*. Take it up with God. It’s God that called you together in one place; it’s God who has called you to love your neighbor, God is the one who has made you one body in his Son. As we heard last week, the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I do not need you.’” Nor can we, because “if one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.” The ministry which Jesus inaugurated right there in the synagogue, depends on all of us for it to continue, it depends on each one of us being who we are, one body in Christ.

The first step in becoming who we are, is what we are doing now. Coming together to be renewed and re-formed in the Eucharist, in Christ's very body and blood. People ask, "why do I have to come to Mass every week?" Well, there's a simple answer to that. Because you need help. Seriously, we all need help, as well as practice at being who we are. God doesn't expect us to go it alone, to do this all by ourselves. He calls us, gathers us together to "practice" who we are in common worship, because how we go in here, so go we out there.

While Christ began his ministry in the synagogue, he didn't **confine** it to the synagogue; he took it outside the walls of worship. That's what he was saying to his fellow Jews. But they would have none of it. They expected Jesus to start his ministry there, do his ministry there, and end his ministry there. But as we see in today's gospel, the synagogue was only the beginning. God's love cannot be contained. Even so, it is no accident that Jesus **began** his public ministry in the synagogue. Ministry gets its start and energy in worship; for us, it begins in the Mass. Here in the divine liturgy, the Mass, Christ is made present in Word, sacrament, and assembly.

It is here that Christ's continued ministry to the sick, the captive, the marginalized, becomes possible because in worshiping together we come to realize (or rather we should realize) that "the parts of the body that seem to be weaker, are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with great honor," namely Christ himself. If we can't do that in here, we won't succeed in being who we are called to be out there.

While we are a generous mix of persons and ideas, gifts and talents, no matter how different we may be from one another, our lives are brought together into this one body by the love of Jesus Christ. We gather here, in this place, because **God's love** has touched us through the gifts offered and shared by Christ's body. As the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins once said: "for Christ plays in ten thousand places, Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his; To the Father through the features of men's faces." When we act as Christ's body we become who we are, we discover ourselves in those we touch, we create communion in the love we share, and find true fulfillment in the oneness we help create.