The Third Sunday after the Epiphany
Rolling Meadows -- 1980

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IN NOMINE JESU

I CORINTHIANS 12: 12-21, 26,27

The first thing that our text underscores is that there is no such thing in Christianity as individual Christianity. There is no such thing as Christianity in isolation, being Christian without the Church. There can be none of this "I've got God in my heart" bit -- "I know the love of God in Christ and that's all that matters." The implication, of course, is, "I can be a Christian without going to Church." Not only is this idea damnably selfish -- "I'm saved and the hell with everybody else, or at least let them fend for themselves" -- but it is manifestly impossible. In fact, it hasn't happened since Pentecost. Always, always, always you are saved with the people of God. This is what our text keeps saying: "FOR JUST AS THE BODY IS ONE AND HAS MANY MEMBERS, AND ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE BODY, THOUGH MANY, ARE ONE BODY, SO IT IS WITH CHRIST.....FOR THE BODY DOES NOT CONSIST OF ONE MEMBER BUT OF MANY.....GOD ARRANGED THE ORGANS IN THE BODY, EACH ONE OF THEM, AS HE CHOSE. IF ALL WERE A SINGLE ORGAN, WHERE WOULD THE BODY BE? AS IT IS, THERE ARE MANY PARTS, YET ONE BODY.....NOW YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST AND INDIVIDUALLY MEMBERS OF IT."

In an article entitled, "Is TV Religion Replacing the Church?" Dr. Martin E. Marty talks about the way television and radio ministries are hurting the ~~little~~ neighborhood church ~~on the corner~~. He emphsizes the "celebrity approach" which is used on television

and he says, "Huge empires like Oral Roberts and Rex Humbard and the Armstrongs -- what we are getting is that the strongest trait in Christianity is toward clienteles; it's not toward congregations.....People's loyalty is neither to their long-pull tradition -- being Methodists, being Baptists, being Lutherans -- nor to their home congregations -- First Methodist, First Lutheran and so on..... Their loyalty is toward that media person, that celebrity who is currently attracting them. It might be Corie ten Boom or Dave Wilkerson or Anita Bryant or Johnny Cash or Ruth Carter Stapleton.... When I feel out of tune with myself, when I feel a need for healing, I sort of go down the list of therapies and find that Ruth Carter Stapletone, for example, speaks most directly to me. I go to her meetings, I buy her books and I sort of follow her around. I may never meet another person who is part of the Stapleton clientele."

The article goes on to talk about "upstaging," about "the competition you get when your people turn on the television at 9 o-clock Sunday morning to something that is very fast paced, utterly professional, full of fountains, full of candles, full of entertainers, full of celebrities..... Then you're supposed to go to the little ... church down the block and hear an amateur choir and a stumbling minister, sitting with people with arm-pit odor and having to go to meetings all week..... The local church is just getting out-glamorized." And now comes the punch line! "Sometimes, however," Dr. Marty asserts, "people need people, and in that instance they need the small, local congre-

gation. When a person has a malignant tumor, it doesn't help a lot to have someone on a television set far away. Then is when you need people near you."

That is exactly what our text is saying. People need people -- and in the Christian community there are no distinctions between race, or class, or color. "FOR BY ONE SPIRIT WE WERE ALL BAPTIZED INTO ONE BODY -- JEWS OR GREEKS, SLAVES OR FREE (that's the sacrament of initiation into the Body of Christ) AND ALL WERE MADE TO DRINK OF ONE SPIRIT (that's the sacrament of joy and thanksgiving the celebration for being a member of the Body of Christ. And in this unitedd membership -- people bound together with people -- the whole body functions together. You don't just amputate an arm or a leg and say, "Go off over there and exist by yourself." You know what will happen to that arm or leg. Separated from the body, individual members will shrivel up and decay.

What is more, let no one imagine that his or her membership is unimportant. Oh, it may be that the rest of the body might be able to function without you -- but you are important! And it doesn't matter if you are only a little toe nail -- you are important! "IF THE FOOT SHOULD SAY, 'BECAUSE I AM NOT A HAND, I DO NOT BELONG TO THE BODY,' THAT WOULD NOT MAKE IT ANY LESS A PART OF THE BODY. AND IF THE EAR SHOULD SAY, 'BECAUSE I AM NOT AN EYE, I DO NOT BELONG TO THE BODY,' THAT WOULD NOT MAKE IT ANY LESS A PART OF THE BODY. IF THE WHOLE BODY WERE AN EYE, WHERE WOULD BE THE HEARING? IF THE WHOLE BODY WERE AN EAR, WHERE WOULD BE THE SENSE OF SMELL?"

It is true, as we heard last week, that the Spirit gives different gifts to different people. Some have more responsible positions than others. But that is nothing to boast about or brag about. After all, they are still all gifts of the "one Spirit." That is to say, they are not yours or mine in our own right. So there should be no reason for anyone getting a "big head!" One person or group should never perceive itself as superior to others -- for in God's plan all are really alike. "THE EYE CANNOT SAY TO THE HAND, 'I HAVE NO NEED OF YOU,' NOR AGAIN TO HEAD TO THE FEET, 'I HAVE NO NEED OF YOU.'" The point is that no one can think that the whole church's existence hinges on him or her. But that is precisely the temptation which befalls church leaders -- clergy and laity alike. Leander Keck calls them "church bureaucrats." They have been in the business so long they just can't imagine anyone else doing it. The Church will rise or fall on their actions..... If that kind of "ego trip" doesn't dismiss the power of the Holy Spirit, I don't know what does.

No! No! No! We were made members of the Church -- the Body of Christ -- to help and support one another -- certainly not to lord it over one another. "IF ONE MEMBER SUFFERS, ALL SUFFER TOGETHER; IF ONE MEMBER IS HONORED, ALL REJOICE TOGETHER." That's the way Jesus Himself lived out His ministry to create the Church, His Body. In today's Gospel we hear of Jesus going to church in the synagogue in His home town, Nazareth. He reads to the congregation from the Book of Isaiah the prophecy which speaks of

proclaiming "RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES AND RECOVERING OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET AT LIBERTY THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." Then He closes the Book, gives it back to the attendant, sits down, and says to them, "TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE HAS BEEN FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING." He came to heal not only broken limbs and blinded eyes, but also broken people, separated by their angers and hostilities and all the other sins that beset them.

In a few minutes we will gather around the Lord's Table to say to one another that we are the Body of Christ. We will gather with Jesus Himself at the head of the Table -- sharing His own life, His own Body and Blood with us -- affirming His grace, His forgiveness, His mercy. He doesn't want to do without us. So, don't go away. We really cannot do without you. Amen.