



Come and See!

January 27, 2019

The Word...

“God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended....

Indeed, 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 greater honor...

But God has so constructed the body
as to give greater honor to a part that is without it,
so that there may be no division in the body,
but that the parts may have the same concern for one another.

If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it;
if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.

(from 1 Cor 12:12-30)

Pondering the Word...

I hope all who have responsibility for the lectionary today will opt to read the longer version of this passage and not the truncated one. For as many times as I have heard this, its meaning really hits home now.

How appropriate is Paul’s message as we consider refugees seeking asylum: those who are weaker or might be considered “less honorable,” those from violent homes, those who suffer abuse and indignity, sometimes at the hands of their would-be rescuers. Or those whose livelihoods are threatened, forced out of work by division and corruption in the very institutions that are supposed to work for them.

“If one part (of the Body of Christ) suffers, all the parts suffer with it.” I have to ask myself: Do I really believe this? Do I have the same concern for the parts of Christ’s Body that are without honor? When I read stories or see images of women and children desperately trying to reach safety, I suffer. I cry and cry out to God. But going about my day-to-day activities? How present are they to me? And what do I do about it?

Paul tells us that we surround less honorable parts with greater honor, and that God “constructed the body to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division.” I shudder to think of how far I am, how far we are, from the ideal God intends and hopes for humanity.

“We are one, after all, you and I. Together we suffer, together exist, and forever will recreate each other.”

(Teilhard de Chardin)

Living the Word...

This is a tough subject for me. I feel impotent to make any meaningful change, and I need to channel my frustration in more positive ways. I would guess that in almost every community, there are organizations, religious and secular, that assist those seeking refuge. And for those of us blessed to live in a democracy—no matter how fragile it may seem now—we need to continue to put pressure on elected officials through letters, emails, visits, votes, and whatever other means are available. If we are blessed with financial resources, we need to put our money where our mouths are and support legitimate, compassionate efforts on the front lines. And of course, we need to pray—fervently—for those who suffer and for those who ignore their plight; that those in a position to make a difference will begin to feel deeply the suffering of others in their own hearts.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Jan 28: *"No one can enter a strong man's house to plunder his property unless he ties up the strong man."* (Mk 3:22-30)
The "strong man" in this parable is the devil. The elders accuse Jesus of driving out demons from Satan's "property" by the power of the devil itself. Jesus counters by acknowledging the powerful grip of evil, but showing his spirit is more powerful, able to take from the devil what it has possessed. This talk of Satan, evil, and the devil can make us uneasy. We are foolish to underestimate the power of evil, but we are empowered by Jesus' spirit within. Remember: *"When the devil comes a-knockin,' just say, 'Jesus, will you get that for me?'"*

Jan 29: *"First he says, Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings, you neither desired nor delighted in. These are offered according to the law. Then he says, Behold, I come to do your will."* (Heb 10:1-10)
Wait a minute. What about the Book of Leviticus? It contains great detail about the types of sin, peace, and burnt offerings the Lord requires. Why does God give such specific instructions for offerings he neither desires nor delights in? The simple answer is this: God, as God always does, comes to us where we are. The Israelites are people of their time; sacrifices like this are commonplace. God knows they will stray and need a way to repent and show faith in God's mercy. And of course, God knows his plan for salvation, once and for all, through Christ—the one willing to sacrifice the thing most pleasing to God: his will. The faith of the ancients, demonstrated by their obedience to God's laws, is rewarded through Christ. Jesus shows us what God wants from each of us: the promise we will try our best to sacrifice our own will and do God's will, just as he did.

Jan 30: *"...he also says: 'Their sins and their evildoing I will remember no more.'"* (Heb 10:11-18)
The author of Hebrews quotes the prophet Jeremiah (31: 34) saying that God not only forgives, but forgets. Pope Francis, in the recent documentary, "A Man of His Word," speaks to prisoners about this gift of "forgetting," and challenges society to model ourselves after this attribute of God. This is a tough concept for most of us to accept. Just forgiving is hard enough. But really, when you think about it, can you really truly forgive someone but still allow the transgression to occupy your thoughts? True forgiveness means we no longer dwell on the hurt. A good metaphor to consider: when you look at a scar on your body, what do you think of: the pain that caused the scar or the blessing of healing and wholeness?

Jan 31: *"We must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works. We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another..."* (Heb 10:19-25)
This is an apt passage for the time of year (at least where I live), but also for the times we are living through. It's tempting to want to hide from all the negative language and bad news. *"A time like this demands: strong minds, great hearts, true faith, ready hands."* (Josiah Holland) Are you struggling to keep a positive, hopeful outlook? I am, and one of the best ways I can combat it is to reach out to help others. See if you can channel the negative energy to do something good for someone in need. Look to draw strength by doing and praying with your community. Rouse one another to love and good works.

Feb 1: *"Therefore, do not throw away your confidence... You need endurance to do the will of God and receive what he has promised."* (Heb 10:32-39)

The passage is a good fit with yesterday's and tomorrow's readings, but it speaks to me on a more personal level. It's not just about enduring difficulties faced by our institutions. We need confidence and endurance in our own lives, first to discern God's will for us, and to then to work towards doing that will. If you feel confidence waning, turn to Jesus. Remember he suffered too, and will strengthen you and give you hope.

Feb 2: *"...Yes, he is coming," says the LORD of hosts. "But who will endure the day of his coming? ...he will purify the sons of Levi, refining them like gold or silver that they may offer due sacrifice to the LORD."* (Mal 3:1-4)
The sons of Levi are the priests of the Jewish people. As I read this, I can't help but think of the good and holy priests, ministers, rabbis, imams, gurus, lamas...leaders in all faith traditions who suffer greatly from the sins of their brothers and sisters in ministry, and from the cover-ups by their institutions. Malachi talks of enduring "fire and lye," but he doesn't say they will perish. Instead, they will be refined. Extraneous material will be purged so that the best of what remains will emerge, ready to be in God's presence. Let us pray for that to happen. And if you are feeling some heat in your own life--bitterness or a harsh situation--see if you can allow the trial you experience to burn away things that stand in your way of offering sacrifice and praise to God.