

Being Church in Today's World



As baptised members of the body of Christ, God's Church, we are called to die to self and follow the way of Jesus. This way of living is a gradual embodying of Christ, and leads us to the fulfilment of our individual lives and that of the whole body of Christ and our world, as God plans and desires. Each individual does this in a different way.

We can imagine the three young hens in the two pictures above as representing the body of Christ. They have come together to keep warm and for protection as they prepare for their night's sleep. Although the hens are similar to each other, they are also individuals. This can be seen in the way each one is looking in a different direction, what for, I do not know. We can imagine them checking out anything which might be a threat to them individually and as a group when it becomes dark and they have tucked their heads under their wings.

Like the hens, we are individuals with varying gifts, strengths and weaknesses, but belonging to a human family, and also to the Church, the body of Christ.

Our vocation as Christians is to be members of the one body of Christ. As Paul writes in Romans 12:4-6, "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of

one another.” In 1 Corinthians 12:12-30, Paul repeats how we are members of the one body and are necessarily different with particular abilities like a foot or a hand of a human body. Each member, whatever their gift, is important to the whole, cares for the whole and suffers when any part of the body suffers. We experience this in our own body where our arms, legs and eyes etc. work and suffer separately and also together, as they support and implement the life and work of our body. In these times of the coronavirus and the subsequent restrictions to our social lives we, as individuals, are particularly conscious of our need for others and how others might require our help. This help will often be received or given in small ways, such as when we are thanked or give thanks to others for an action of care, or when people ask how another is feeling and wait compassionately for the answer. We may also give one another unexpected help if we have skills they do not have.

But there is more to being a member of the body of Christ than just caring for one another. The image of a body illustrates that each of us are not only to support the body of which we are a part, but we are to participate in the work of that body, the mission of God. In general that will mean revealing God’s love to others, enabling them to fulfil their lives in the way for which God created them. This may be through our involvement in the various groups run by the Church to assist those in need. With our variety of gifts, Christ can work through us expressing God’s love in relevant ways to serve others in our world.

We who are members of the Church are not to regard ourselves as baptised elite who are to witness to God’s love by persuading others to become Christians just to increase our congregations. Actually, individual Christians and Church groups are seldom these days treated as elite. Instead we are often reminded of our failures to love, support and help others in need. God does not reject us in these situations, but uses our experience of them as a way for us to grow in love and compassion. Knowing we are sinners and make mistakes helps us to better understand and serve others who have also failed, and be more ready to give and receive the mercy and forgiveness of God.

I believe that all people are created and loved by God and should be shown God's love and care by those who follow Jesus. It does not matter if they are young or aged, poor or rich, sick or well, with dementia or very intelligent, Christians or atheists, all are to be respected as God's children. In fact, Jesus treated the needy and rejected as particularly important. We read how he stopped to heal a leper who cried out to him in the street, (Luke 5:12ff), forgave the sins of a woman named as a sinner, (Luke 7:48) and welcomed children brought to him (Mark 10:14).

We are called to be open to God's direction to perform tasks of loving and caring for all others in a variety of ways, both as individuals and as members of a Church, or another group where Christ might choose to be present or embodied. At times we may not be able to help people physically ourselves, but we can pray for them and those who are actively ministering to them.

So, being Church, members of the Body of Christ in today's world, is a challenging life but also fulfilling. We give up our selfish living to live and work, individually and together, for others, surrounded, guided and supported by one another and the powerful but gentle love of God who is the Creator of us all and our world.

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