

January 26, 2025 – Epiphany 3 Pastor Ventura

That There Be No Division 1 Corinthians 12:12–31a

Dear Friends in Christ, Grace and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever been at a hall of distorting mirrors, or something similar? I haven't, but given some of the picture I have seen, people have lots of fun going to or seeing themselves in such deformed shapes that a particular mirror reflects.

Now, I wonder if we were going to stand in front of those mirrors ourselves, what or how do you think will we look like? Well, the shape and figure we are going to see depends on the mirror, I would say. In the same way, the world can look at us. And I'm sure to the world and to each eye looking at us we all portray distinct shapes and figures, and if we ask around what they see, I think we are going to get all kinds of responses. Today, though, we are not going to consider each of our personal shapes. Although in the same way that a funhouse mirror disfigures the image of your body, a distorted mind leads to a portraying a disfigured life, that's for sure. And we need to consider that, but given our epistle reading for this morning, we are going to focus on something different. We are going to focus on our congregational body, the church, after all the church is the Body of Christ. How would the looking eyes from the outside describe the church? How would they describe this congregation? Well, it depends, I would say. Given each outside person's mindset so it will be the description of the church.

But even that, is not the point of the epistle reading. Rather Paul leads us to view ourselves, as a congregation, to examine ourselves and see if we are being the Body of Christ or not. For that we might need to step outside of ourselves for a bit, and from outside look inward and analyze and determine the state, the condition the shape of the Church, our church, our congregation. Hopefully we are going to see a well structured beautiful and normal body for thus is the Body of Christ! But, but... do you think that is what we are going to see?

Paul is asking the same question of the Corinthians, but Paul already sees something else. What he sees is not a well structured beautiful normal body. What he sees is a divided congregation, divided into factions, and each faction thought they could redesign the church, the Body of Christ, such that their own place in it eclipsed everyone else, like a distorting mirror, created a disfigured

body of the Church, although God knew what he was doing when he designed the body, the sinful human being intends to distort it. So, the Corinthian church was showing a distorted reflection. They were like a human body divided into chunks of muscle, or mismatched length of arms, maybe a big head, or a big belly, thus disfiguring the beauty of God's Church. But that's not how our Lord designed his Body, the church. God knew what he was doing when he designed the body. Paul reminds them of this, when wrote his letter, right there in the first chapter he writes, 'so that "there be no divisions among [them]"' (1:10).

He repeats that statement in our reading for today: "that there may be no division in the body." (v 25) He says so, because the body of Christ is not divided. Not even when Jesus as the Lamb of God was being killed for the sins of the world, his bones were not broken and his body was not divided. Do you suppose that's a thoughtless coincidence? Again, "that there may be no division in the body." Do you think this is important to Paul? More importantly, do you think this is important to our Lord Jesus?

And why should this matter to us, to you? It matters because we're all predisposed to see ourselves as members of that Body in distorted divided ways. Here we can identify two ways. (1) one, either we labor with a misplaced sense of inferiority, or (2) two, we labor with a misplaced sense of superiority.

It's just so easy to talk about those who have an elevated view of themselves, and evidently, there were lots of such people in the church of Corinth. If you read 1 Corinthians cover to cover, you'll see that Paul has already been giving these people a serious talk. But here in chapter 12, he starts with those who are living with feelings of inferiority.

Those who have a sense of inferiority in the body of Christ would say "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," or "because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body" (vv 15–16). The way Paul points this out, helps, actually forces those with feelings of superiority to empathize with those who suffer feelings of inferiority. It gets them off their high horse without knowing that has happened. So gracious!

But both groups need the stinging word of God's Law. The person who says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," is accusing the Lord of bad design. It's a full-on violation of the First Commandment. This feeling of inferiority has a side-effect, it enables the person whose head is

exploding with his or her greatness to dive just that much deeper into his or her delusional parallel universe, meaning to ride even a higher horse, so to speak. And more, those two positions, having a sense of inferiority or superiority, makes love to suffer. Love God! Oops, failed there. Love the neighbor! Oops, failed there too.

Now, feelings of inferiority are not to be confused with humility. Indeed, many people control others with their disabilities or their grievances. Humility is something else.

But God most certainly knew what he was doing when he designed the body, as our text for today reminds us: In verses 18–19 we hear: “But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?” So trying to get out of the group and see what kind of a body we are portraying helps us to deal with that question, and also helps us to realign ourselves with God’s design. In other words, getting off our high horse, or moving out of the sense of inferiority and receive, accept the place God has for you in the congregation, in the Body of Christ.

But there is also a word to those who have a sense of superiority. Verse 21 tells us: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’” Yes, you do! Every member of the body needs every other member of the body. That’s how bodies are made. God knew what he was doing when he designed the body. If the hand does not reach for the bag of carrots, the eye will not receive the vitamin A contained in those carrots so necessary to eye health. God knew what he was doing when he designed the body.

The Psalmist reminds us how good wholesome and beautiful is the body of Christ, just as God’s designed it, with all it’s parts and organs working in sync, when the Psalmist says to the Lord: “You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance” (Ps 139:13–16).

Just as God designed and created our bodies, so he did with the Body of Christ. And we are all made part of that body through baptism, as we are told

that were all “baptized into one body” (v 13). We were incorporated into that one Body by means of Baptism, a Baptism that we all share. That Body happens to be the Body of Christ. The intrinsic and amazing differences between an eyeball and a spleen pale in comparison to the difference between what we all were by nature and the grandeur and glory of what we all are now as members of that one Body of Christ. That’s what enables the psalmist to say, “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Ps 84:10). No doubt this truth inspired Josua Wegelin to write, “For where the Head is”—that would be Jesus—“For where the Head is, there as well I know His members are to dwell When Christ will come and call them” (LSB 492:1). Whatever your abilities and gifts, genius or not, and certainly whatever your past, dark or darker, friend if you are in Christ by Baptism, you are a treasured member of the most exalted Body in the entire cosmos.

Just as Christ has a Body, of which you are a member by Baptism, so you, too, have a body with members. You know how this works. The pancreas doesn’t say to you, “I was a good boy today. Will you please reward me by giving me two ounces of sautéed spinach?” No! You give your body what it needs. If it needs water, you give it water. If it needs rest, you lie down and take a nap or go to sleep in the comfort of your bed. If it needs fresh air, you step outside. You relate to your body by providing for its needs, in a wise and wholesome way. You relate to your body by providing it with gifts, wholesome and wise.

In that sense, Paul invites us to attend the most succulent buffet table just to whet the appetite for “higher gifts” (v 31), those being apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healing, helping, administration, and various kinds of tongues (v 28). We all are gifted with something for the benefit of the body.

All of those gifts are given to ensure “that there may be no division in the body,” because they are there to get the greatest and most necessary gift of all to you, Jesus himself, so that you could be in him.

Sometime this afternoon, stand in front of the mirror and take a good look. No, don’t go to a distorting mirror, rather, the regular mirror you have at home, but don’t let your eyes deceive you. Speak to that person: “You are a marvelous new creation because and only because you have been baptized into the one Body of Christ.” Yes, God most certainly knew what he was doing when he designed the body, and you are part of that design. Amen.