

The design of the human body is all you really need to make the case for a Creator. Just think about the human heart for a moment.

The heart automatically pumps oxygen and nutrient-rich blood throughout the body to sustain life. This fist-sized powerhouse expands and contracts 100,000 times per day, pumping five or six quarts of blood each minute, or about 2,000 gallons per day. And how we need that blood to circulate: in addition to carrying fresh oxygen from the lungs and nutrients to the body's tissues, it also takes the body's waste products away. It is crucial that your heart functions properly. But you could also say that about the lungs; or the brain; or, well, you get the idea.

There are a number of ways that the Bible describes the church. One of the most memorable is the one that Saint Paul uses in his first letter to the Corinthian Christians. He writes, "We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body...now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

You've probably heard those words before: the church is the body of Christ in the world. But do you believe it? Do you understand yourself as being part of something bigger than you? If you are part of that body, do you know what your function is?

Thinking of ourselves as parts of one body, in which we rely on each other is a challenge. It goes against the grain of how we normally like to operate, which is to say, as free agents. We like to honor the rugged individual. We cheer for the person who says, 'right or wrong, I did it my way.' The Word of God takes us in a much different direction. That Word honors our individuality—we are uniquely created and adopted one by one in the waters of baptism—yet we are never just an individual. Paul says, "You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." Because you are baptized and because you trust in Christ, you are part of something beyond yourself. It isn't a matter of wanting to be part of it or trying to be part of it; it just is. Christians are called to be part of a community of believers, as messy as that can be sometimes. The only thing that makes it work is the gospel! The good news of what Jesus has done is the lifeblood of his Body. What I mean is this: everywhere else you go, your status in that community is based on your performance. Only the Christian faith dares to say, "Your performance did not get you here." It was Jesus' performance that got you here. It was baptism and the Holy Spirit that got you here. That's what the gospel says, and what that gospel does is it destroys sinful pride. You cannot possibly look down your nose at another Christian, because we all got here the same way: By God's choice! He chose to forgive you and adopt you and that's it!

That is why St. Paul writes, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!'" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, *so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other*. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

Did you hear that? The parts of the body need each other. The parts of the body of Christ need each other. When one part hurts, the whole body hurts with it. When a part is in good shape, it helps the other parts along. In fact, the stronger parts have a special responsibility to care for the weaker parts. At the same time, parts that may seem to be weaker actually have functions you can't do without.

Some of you may remember that in March of 1981, President Ronald Reagan was shot by John Hinckley, Jr., and was hospitalized for several weeks. Although Reagan was the nation's

chief executive, his hospitalization did not cause the nation's business to grind to a halt. The work of government continued on. On the other hand, suppose all the garbage collectors in our community just decided to stop collecting garbage. What would happen? Not only would things become a mess, but the pile of decaying trash would quickly become a health hazard. What's the point? The point is: Presidents are important, but so are trash collectors, even though we look at them as vastly different jobs. That's also true in the Church.

In the body of Christ, there is no such thing as an insignificant part. As Paul reminds us, "The head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (I Cor. 12:21-22).

God's Word challenges you today to embrace being a member of the body of Christ. Now why would somebody do that?

Let me offer you some reasons. Not only can you gain support from being part of that body, but you gain a purpose. You gain a mission. You need this. You need to know that your life has value. Being a member of Christ's body provides that in a way nothing else can. Being a member of Christ's body attaches you to the actions and activity of Jesus Christ. Attached to Jesus, you're an agent of that salvation; you're a conduit of forgiveness and love that comes from Christ Himself. You are! Paul says it. You are the body of Christ. Do you embrace it? Do you live it?

Paul tells us how to live it. He goes on to describe what being the body means in practical terms. He writes: "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues."

There's a bunch of different jobs in that list, aren't there? And that's the point. We don't all do the same thing, but it all works to the same purpose. When your hands serve, the hands of Jesus are serving. When your words encourage, Jesus is offering encouragement. When your shoulder bears a burden, Jesus is the strength under your strength.

Have you ever put your face into a frame painted to represent a muscle man, a clown, or even a bathing beauty? Many of us have had our pictures taken this way, and the photos are humorous because the head doesn't fit the body. If we could picture Jesus as the head of this body of believers—as the Head of St. Mark--would our community laugh at the misfit? Or would they stand in awe of a body so closely related to its head?

The body of Christ does not sit around doing nothing; nor does the body of Christ exist primarily to serve itself. The body of Christ is active; it is busy looking for people to help and love and save. You are a part of this. You have a unique role to play. Your feet to go. Your hands to serve and embrace. Your heart to be full of compassion. Your ears to listen with patience. Your mouth to speak and sing of Jesus. Let's be his body together.