

*You Are Christ's Body*  
*Father Frank Matera*  
*Ordinary 3C 2013*

What image comes to mind when you hear the word "church"? Do you think of a building or of a place? Do you think of priests, bishops, and popes? Do you think of an impersonal institution? If you do, I am not surprised. After all, we call this building the church; and it is. We call the church an institution; and it is. But in today's second reading Saint Paul presents us with another vision of church: a vision that is dynamic and vital.

The church, he says, is a living organism. It is the body of Christ and each one of us is a member of this body. The church is not only an institution; it is a community of people baptized into the crucified and risen Christ. It is a community of believers who make Christ present to the world. The church is a living organism; it is Christ's body.

We are the church because we have been baptized into the body of Christ. Through our baptism we became members of the body of Christ. Through our baptism, we were called to proclaim the gospel to the world. At our baptism the Spirit of God gave us a variety of gifts. Some of us, like the Stephen ministers of our parish, have gifts of healing and compassion; others such as our parish office staff have gifts of service and administration. Still others like our school and CCD teachers have gifts of teaching and counseling; others like Deacon Art have gifts of prayer and healing. Others like our choir members, musicians, and lectors have gifts of singing and proclaiming God's Word. And still others have gifts that they have not yet begun to explore.

Like any body, the body of Christ is made up of different members, and so there is always a danger of rivalry and jealousy. But it is this diversity that enriches the body and enables it to function. Moreover, although some members may appear to be more important than others, every member is necessary if the church is to be the body of Christ.

Consider your body. When a member of your body is not functioning properly, you say that you are sick. And so it is with the body of Christ. When members of the Christ's body are not functioning, the church is infirm because the body is not operating to its full capacity. As members of Christ, we are so united to each other in his body that when one member of the body suffers, all the members of the body ought to grieve. And when one member of the body is honored, all the members of the body should rejoice.

Those of you who are in your teenage years are in the process of discovering your special gifts within the body of Christ, the church. You may not believe what I am about to say, but if you are faithful and patient in your faith, you will discover your gift and play an important role in the body of Christ. Those of you who are older already know your gift. But you may have neglected that gift, and you may be at that point in your life when you need to revive that gift and rededicate yourself to the body of Christ, for the sake of his church.

When we live as the body of Christ, we make Christ present to the world. We take on the mission of Christ to heal and to teach. We take on the mission of Christ to cast out the power of

evil and bring the gospel to the world. We carry on the ministry of Christ because we are the living body of Christ.

The next time you think of the church as merely a building, say to yourself, *I am a member of the body of Christ*. The next time that you think that the church is an impersonal institution, say to yourself *I am a member of the body of Christ*. The next time that you think that the church is irrelevant, say to yourself *I am a member of the body of Christ*. The next time that you say that the church has failed, *remember that you are the church*. You are the body of Christ. It is your mission to make Christ present to world.

In a few moments, we will receive the Eucharist, the body of Christ, and enter more deeply into the body of Christ. As we do, we pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we are the members of your body. Teach us to live in harmony with each other. Teach us to respect and encourage each other's gifts. Teach us that each one of us has a vital role to play in your church. Crucified and risen Savior, make us one in your body. Crucified and risen Lord, give us the grace to make your body present to the world. Amen.