

## HOMILY

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Once upon a time, almost everybody was an ear. All the ears had a big convention and were having a wonderful time when a nose and a mouth walked in, sat down in the back row, and were very quiet. But soon the sergeant-at-arms walked over and said, "You fellows don't look like ears to me. I'm kicking you out." So the nose and mouth left. But after a while, the convention hall caught fire and destroyed all the ears because no noses were there to smell the smoke and no mouths were there to warn them the place was on fire.

A person who loses her sense of smell suffers. A person who loses his eyes is in serious trouble. And St. Paul is saying the same thing about members of Christ's Body, the Church. Every one of us is essential; everyone is indispensable.

But perhaps you feel like you're not good enough to be important to the world. Author Max Lucado believes that a society that doesn't believe in God sees no inherent value in human beings. What makes us different from a rock or an old sock? And, if we have no inherent, inborn value as human beings, then we must create our own criteria to measure value. So we tend to value people either for their appearance or their performance. If you're good-looking, smart, athletic, or if you can earn a lot of money, then you are valuable. If you don't fit that criteria, you're just taking up space.

But check out Jesus' value system. He loved the outcast, the poor, the handicapped, the unclean, and the sinner. Jesus does not depend on what we do for him. *In the eyes of Jesus, you have value simply because of who you are!* Let's listen to that again. *In the eyes of Jesus, you have value simply because of who you are!* Makes us all sit up a little straighter, doesn't it? You are of infinite value. You have skills, abilities and life experiences that other people need.

You may have seen those signs out in front of churches that read, “WHAT’S MISSING IN “CH—CH? UR.” Yes, I know these signs are corny, but the sentiment is true: you are important to the Body of Christ. We can’t spell CHURCH without U nor can we spell UNITY or EQUALITY without U.

To be a follower of Christ is to be part of a family, part of a body, as it were. Community is not optional for the Christian. The Christian community is a reflection of the Jewish community out of which it was born. To be a Jew is to be part of a covenant people. It is to be part of a holy nation. So it is with those who follow Jesus. We are part of a family. We are members of a royal priesthood. We are hands and eyes and toes on a distinct body. Metaphorically, the Body of Christ.

We all have something we need to be doing to help the body survive and grow according to the gifts God has given us. Some of us are compassionate listeners. We could be visiting shut-ins. Some of us have outgoing personalities. We could be active in the evangelism work of the Church. Some of us work well with little children. The list goes on and on. We have unique gifts and it is important that we use those gifts to serve the body.

One Sunday a family attended an African church in Zimbabwe. Midway through the service two young men came forward to sing. They were awful! People began to snicker and began to even laugh out loud. A third young man stood up in the congregation, came forward, and joined in the signing. When the trio filled out they sounded great! They received an enthusiastic response when they finished.

This is what happens when all people give their gifts. All parts of the Body of Christ are needed to make beautiful music. And it is true; our Church cannot be the church that God has called it to be if each of us is not doing our part.

This brings us to one other part, which needs to be shared. Because we are the Body of Christ, the sum is far greater than the individual parts. That is, the Church is not simply another human institution. We are not like the Lion’s Club or the Kiwanis. They are great organizations, but at the core they are different from the Church. The Church relies not only on the

commitment of its members, the Church relies on the Spirit of the Living God. And because the Church relies on the Spirit of the Living God, we accomplish far more than human institutions can ever hope for.

There is a story of an ancient king of Babylon who came back to life and visited one of our modern cities. His host showed him the underside of the city: brothels, gambling and drug dens, taverns, and the like. The king was polite but bored. He said, “We had all these in Babylon three thousand years ago and, on the whole, we did it better. Have you nothing new to show me?” So his guide reversed his field and took his guest to churches, day care centers, libraries, schools, hospitals, public health centers, research laboratories, transient center, institutions for the disabled, and soup kitchens. “Ah,” said the king, “all this is new. We didn’t have these things in Babylon.”

No, they didn’t have those things in Babylon because they did not have the Church of Jesus Christ. I challenge you to go into any non-Christian nation in this world and find the level of ministry to the intellectual, social, physical, and spiritual needs of people that you will find in those countries in which Christians are the majority. Search out the histories of our great universities, our great hospitals, our great benevolent societies and you will find, more often than not, that they were begun in the name of Christ. The Church is an institution unlike any other in this world and the reason is that our founder is still with us. It is he who breathes life into his weary followers; it is he who still beckons with the call, “Follow me.”

We are his body. All of us are important. There is something each of us can do in his service. Most importantly of all, he is alive and he is with us.