

### Third Sunday in Ordinary time 2016

**READINGS: Nehemiah 8:2-4, 5-6, 8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12-30; Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21.**

Once upon a time, the various parts of the body began complaining against the stomach. "Look at me," says the hand, "I till the soil to plant the seeds, I harvest the crops, I prepare the food. All that the stomach ever does is lie there waiting to be fed. This is unfair." The feet agreed, "Me too, I carry the heavy stomach around all day, I carry him to the farm to get food, I carry him to the river to get water, I even carry him up the palm tree to get palm wine, and all the stomach ever does is lie there and expect to get his ration of food, water and wine whenever he needs them. This is unfair." The head, too complained how he carries all the heavy load from the farm and from the river, all to feed the stomach who does nothing to help. The parts of the body decided that this injustice must stop. To force the issue, they decided to embark on a protest action. They agreed to stop working and feeding the lazy stomach until the stomach learns to be a responsible citizen of the body.

A whole day went by and the stomach was not given any food or water or wine. All that the stomach did was groan from time to time while the others taunted him. By the second day of starving the stomach, the head said that he was beginning to feel dizzy. By the third day, the hands reported that they were feeling weak, and the feet were wobbly and could not stand straight. Then it dawned on them that, much as they were visibly supporting the stomach, the stomach was also supporting them in a less obvious but equally important way. It dawned on them that by feeding the stomach they were feeding themselves without knowing it. So they called off their strike action and went back to work to feed the stomach. Their strength returned and together with the stomach they lived happily together after.

The story makes the point that everybody in the community is making a vital contribution, even those who appear to do nothing but consume what others produce. Paul, in the 2nd reading, makes a similar point.

The members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. Those members of the body that we think less honorable are clothed with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body (1 Corinthians 12:22-25).

We know that poor people envy rich people. What we do not know is that sometimes it is rich people who envy poor people? Why do the rich envy the poor for paying no taxes? Haven't you heard people complain that they pay their taxes and people on welfare get a free ride? If you feel street people and welfare recipients are getting a free ride, try trading places with them for one cold night.

I know a bishop who had a very able and gifted man in his pastoral council. If you wanted anything done, and done well, give it to this man. One day the bishop called him and gave him another assignment. This man could not bear it any longer? "My Lord," he said, "Am I the only person in the pastoral council? Why must every work be given to me while there are some people there doing absolutely nothing? The wise bishop said to him, "Would you want me to pray so that no one ever calls on you to do anything again?" The man got the point. He would not like to trade places with the less gifted members of the council who could not complete an assignment. From then on he stopped complaining and was happy to put his talents to work for the common good.

Today the word of God challenges us to give up that secret pleasure we get by comparing ourselves with others and thinking that other people are inferior. No part of the human body is inferior. In the same way, no member of the church community should be regarded as inferior. God has given each one of us different gifts, different opportunities, different job descriptions in life. Our concern should be to try to be faithful to the grace that God gives us day by day. On the last day, God will tell us who did more than the other. And, oh, what a surprise that would be!

**Prayer:** Voice of Jesus, call to us when we stray too far from you. Eyes of Jesus, smile upon us when we need encouragement. Hands of Jesus, anoint us when we grow weak and weary. Arms of Jesus lift us up when we stumble and fall. Heart of Jesus, help us to love one another as you have loved us.