

Son-Shine

Thanks in large part to our recurring readings from Ephesians, we've been hearing a lot about building up the Body of Christ. This is the mission of the Church according to the author of Ephesians—to build up the Body of Christ. This language is a synthesis or a crystallization of what's said elsewhere in the New Testament. In Romans and 1st Corinthians, St. Paul advances the idea that the Holy Spirit gifts us differently with the Church thereby becoming a body where some of us our eyes and some of us our ears and some of us our noses and some of us our hands and some of us our feet. And then also in his letter to the Romans, St. Paul describes the common goal the variously gifted Body of Christ is to pursue. It's the goal of building each other up for a life of faith, hope, and love. Likely aware of all these various strands of previous thought, the author of Ephesians puts them all together and says our mission is to build up the Body of Christ.

For me, at least, this ancient articulation of the mission of the Church accords quite nicely with our stated mission at Mt. Calvary of inviting every generation on a shared journey to Christian growth. In the grand scheme of things, talk of building up the Body of Christ has both a quantitative and a qualitative dimension to it. Quantitatively, we build up the Body of Christ by inviting and welcoming others into our fellowship until there's no one left to invite and welcome. I think this is what our mission statement has in mind when it says we're here to invite, to invite every generation on a shared journey. Qualitatively, we build up the Body of Christ when we help each other grow up into the full stature of Christ. I think this is what our mission statement has in mind when it says the shared journey that interests us at Mt. Calvary is a shared journey to Christian growth. And then, there's the idea that we're to do all of this together. We're to be a body, a collection of skin, bones, and organs, a collection of limbs, digits and, sockets, that works together for our mutual wellbeing and for the praise of God's glory. I think this mutuality, this equality, this inclusivity is what our mission statement has in mind when it speaks of how we want young, old, and in-between to be a part of things, with everyone sharing, sharing the journey to Christian growth. When stacked up against the mission of the Church advanced in Ephesians, I think it's pretty clear that our stated mission to make Mt. Calvary about inviting every generation on a shared journey to Christian growth is quite faithful. But as faithful as it may be, there are things that can get in the way of making this happen.

One of them is forgetting who heads up our organization. In the heat of the moment, or perhaps not choosing our language carefully, we can say, "This is my church" or the related "This is our church." Nothing could be further from the truth. The Church and every one of its congregations belong not to us, but to Christ. The same can be said of the time, the talent, and the treasure Christian communities have available for use. These resources aren't ours. The Church's time, talent, and treasure belong to Christ. Whether it's here at Mt. Calvary or somewhere else, these resources are to be used for Christ's glory and in a manner that follows Christ's example and teaching. It's why the letter to the Ephesians more than once calls the Church the Body OF Christ; the body OF Christ. As the OF Christ part makes clear, the Church is Christ's possession not ours. We belong to Christ, not Christ to us. Our gifts come from Christ and are to be used as Christ would have them used. It's Christ who heads up this organization. It's Christ who is the brains behind our operation. And my, oh my, is our mission compromised and confounded when we forget this. When in doubt, when pressed for decision, it's got to be "what would Christ do" not "what would I or me and mine do."

This perhaps explains why today's reading from Ephesians does not prohibit anger. In fact, ours is a reading which says to us, "Be angry." Evidently, there's room for righteous

indignation and prophetic protest and passionate conviction in our fellowship with one another and the Holy Trinity. And if Christ heads up our organization, how could it be otherwise! The gospel of John tells us that Jesus brought a whip into Jerusalem's Temple to chase out the animals and the moneychangers selling them. All the gospels, I believe, tell us that Jesus decried how God's house, what was to be a house of prayer, had become a den of thieves. And then there's the fact that both Jesus and his forerunner John the Baptist don't shy away from calling out hypocrisy when they see it. In fact, John the Baptist goes so far as to call one particular collection of hypocrites "a brood of vipers."

Look! Jesus may have said, "Blessed are the meek and poor in spirit." But he also said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." When you hunger and thirst that bad for right relations here on earth, righteous indignation, prophetic protest, and passionate conviction will bubble forth sometimes. In small doses, there's room for all of it in the Church. The example of Christ and the letter to the Ephesians both tell us so. But as our reading from Ephesians puts it today, we also don't want to let the sun go down on our anger. Otherwise, our wider and greater mission of building up the Body of Christ will be compromised and maybe even confounded. In order for the Son of God Jesus the Christ to shine, in order for his Body to be built up, we need to forgo anger which is not sparked by something that strays from Christ's example or violates Christ's teaching. And if such a departure from Christ's example and teaching does in fact exist, we need to call it out in the fashion most likely to be heard, trusting that hearing will in fact take place, and then go back to being just one member of the Body of Christ; together united in building that Body up for ministries of love. Not letting the sun go down on our anger is mission critical as our reading from Ephesians makes clear. It also is consistent with the example of Christ.

On Good Friday, most of the gospels tell us there was darkness from noon until three in the afternoon. These were atmospheric conditions which asked: Will the Son of God Jesus the Christ shine, will he be the Light of the World, or shall the darkness overcome him? In many ways, the resolution of this question had to do with Jesus' ability to work through anger in a way that did not compromise the wider and greater mission of building up his Body, the Church. For one, Jesus was not pleased with the barbs and the brutality he had to endure on Good Friday. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness, for right relations between neighbors, he said from the cross, "I thirst." But this also wasn't the end of the story. From the cross, Jesus also said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Having thus both expressed and resolved his anger, the gospels tell us the sun began to shine again.

Similarly, on Good Friday, Jesus was not happy with his Father and our Father in heaven; saying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" But this again was not the last word, with Jesus saying just before his death, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having once again both expressed and resolved the anger in his heart and head, the gospels here too tell us the sun began to shine again. If Jesus the Son of God was to shine again, was to be the Light of the World again, if his Body the Church was to be born and built up, our Lord had to be true to the anger he rightly felt on Good Friday while also not letting that anger persist to the point where Evil could turn it to its advantage. The same will prove to be true for us if we are to shine as the Church and build up the Body of Christ for ministries of love. The light can't shine in the darkness, we can't be the light of the world as Jesus calls us to be in the Sermon on the Mount, if we let the sun go down on our anger. When a betrayal of Christ's teaching and example is involved, let's express our anger in the way most likely to be heard, trusting that hearing shall in fact take place, and then get back to being just one member of the Body so that the Body's wider and greater mission of building itself up for the praise of God's glory might not be compromised or confounded.

Amen!