

In today's first reading the prophet Jeremiah was told that God has a mission to entrust him before he was formed in his mother's womb. God said, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you". Jeremiah was hearing from the Creator of the universe, the One who formed humanity in the divine image.

That introduction revealed to Jeremiah that God was as close to him as his own mother and loving and powerful enough to fashion him for what he could become. Not only did Jeremiah perceive his calling very early but he also understood that it was not something he dreamed up on his own. Rather, it was God, who appointed him as prophet before he was even formed in his mother's womb. This revelation also informed Jeremiah that everything God had done for him was not simply for himself and not only for his own people but for the sake of all the nations.

The mission that was entrusted to Jeremiah was to spread God's liberating words to the whole land of Israel and all other nations. He was called to restore hope into outcast people and let them know the mercy and goodness of God. He was asked to announce the salvation of all peoples. That mission would be hard as kings and princes could persecute him. But God assured him of His protection, "They will fight against you but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you", says the Lord. We can get that salvation if all of us are aware of being parts that constitute one body and then love one another. That is what Paul is telling the Corinthians.

These Corinthian Christians had been fighting with each other over everything: power, prestige, teachers, orthodoxy, supernatural experiences, places in church, and St. Paul is tired of it. He writes to correct these Corinthians and reminds them that they are members of one Body, that they have been called not to exalt themselves but to glorify God together.

To understand this letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, we need to review what was said in the passage reading we heard last week where St. Paul compares the Church to a body with many parts. Are we all ears, eyes, hands, feet? He goes on, "Are all apostles? Are all teachers? Are all administrators? Are all prophets? Of course not.

There are no super Christians who possess every spiritual gift. It is only when we come together as a Church and pool our gifts as the Body of Christ that we can be that wall of brass, that pillar of iron, against the excesses of our culture of which Jeremiah speaks or, as we might say today, that lighthouse that remains firm and filled with light in the middle of stormy seas. We do that as a Church.

Only together can we be that inclusive community of which Jesus speaks in the Gospel reading that brings salvation to all peoples and be the place where Jesus dwells today. We do that as a Church.

St. Paul says we need each other's gifts to effectively proclaim the Gospel. He then tells the Corinthians that he will show them a way of building up the Body of Christ that is open not to a few but to all of them and that is the way of love. That is today's second reading. But the love of which he speaks here is not romantic love or self-absorbed love but sacrificial love that forgives, heals, speaks truth and doesn't envy.

Love makes the world go round but it is not romantic love that does so but love that is sacrificial like the love of parents for children, love of patriots for their country, love of Christians for the good of the Church. This is the kind of love that gives life because it is Christ's kind of love. If we don't find that kind of love around us, St. Thérèse of Lisieux once wrote, then we should put it there. The vocation of every Christian, whatever other gifts we may have, is to show sacrificial love and build up the people and the Church around us. And, if we don't find much of it where we are, to put it there. But this takes teamwork. St. Paul used the image of a body.

Nobody has all the gifts the Church needs but we all have a gift the Church needs to fulfill her mission.