

1 Corinthians 12:12

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the body's diversity and the need to care for and respect all members of the body, regardless of their gifts or abilities.

Scripture: Matthew 25:34, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Topics: "Body Of Christ", "Church Unity"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the unity and diversity within the body of Christ, emphasizing that all members are essential and contribute to the body's function and beauty. He uses the analogy of the human body to illustrate how each member, regardless of status or gift, is crucial for the body's overall well-being. Chrysostom encourages believers to care for one another as they would for their own bodies, showing compassion and respect for all members of the Church. He warns against envy and urges listeners to appreciate the unique contributions of each individual, highlighting the importance of unity and mutual support within the Christian community.

Transcript

For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ.

After soothing them from the considerations that the thing given was of free favor; that they received all from one and the self-same Spirit; that it was given to profit withal, that even by the lesser gifts a manifestation was made; and withal having also stopped their mouth from the duty of yielding to the authority of the Spirit: (for all these, says he, works the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as he will; wherefore it is not right to be over-curious:) he proceeds now to soothe them in like manner from another common example, and betakes himself to nature itself, as was his use to do.

For when he was discoursing about the hair of men and women, after all the rest he drew matter thence also to correct them, saying, Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man have long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her? 1 Corinthians 11:14-15 And when he spoke concerning the idol-sacrifices, forbidding to touch them, he drew an argument from the examples also of them that are without, both making mention of the Olympic games, where he says, they which run in a race run all, but one receives the prize: 1 Corinthians 9:24 and confirming these views from shepherds and soldiers and husbandmen. Wherefore he brings forward here also a common example by which he presses on and fights hard to prove that no one was really put in a worse condition: a thing which was

marvellous and surprising to be able to show, and calculated to refresh the weaker sort, I mean, the example of the body. For nothing so consoles the person of small spirit and inferior gifts, or so persuades him not to grieve, as the being convinced that he is not left with less than his share. Wherefore also Paul making out this point, thus expresses himself: for as the body is one and has many members.

Do you see his exact consideration? He is pointing out the same thing to be both one and many. Wherefore also he adds, pressing the point more vigorously, and all the members of the one body, being many, are one body. He said not, being many, are of one body, but the one body itself is many: and those many members are this one thing. If therefore the one is many, and the many are one, where is the difference? Where the superiority? Where the disadvantage? For all, says he, are one: and not simply one, but being strictly considered in respect of that even which is principal, i.e., their being a body, they are found all to be one: but when considered as to their particular natures, then the difference comes out, and the difference is in all alike. For none of them by itself can make a body, but each is alike deficient in the making a body, and there is need of a coming together since when the many become one, then and not till then is there one body. Wherefore also covertly intimating this very thing, he said, And all the members of the one body, being many, are one body. And he said not, the superior and the inferior, but being many, which is common to all.

And how is it possible that they should be one? When throwing out the difference of the members, you consider the body. For the same thing which the eye is, this also is the foot in regard of its being a member and constituting a body. For there is no difference in this respect. Nor can you say that one of the members makes a body of itself, but another does not. For they are all equal in this, for the very reason that they are all one body.

But having said this and having shown it clearly from the common judgment of all, he added, so also is Christ. And when he should have said, so also is the Church, for this was the natural consequent he does not say it but instead of it places the name of Christ, carrying the discourse up on high and appealing more and more to the hearer's reverence. But his meaning is this: So also is the body of Christ, which is the Church. For as the body and the head are one man, so he said that the Church and Christ are one. Wherefore also he placed Christ instead of the Church, giving that name to His body. As then, says he, our body is one thing though it be composed of many: so also in the Church we all are one thing. For though the Church be composed of many members, yet these many form one body.

2. Thus having, you see, recovered and raised up by this common example him who thought himself depreciated, again he leaves the topic of common experience, and comes to another, a spiritual one, bringing greater consolation and indicative of great equality of honor. What then is this?

1 Corinthians 12:13

For in one Spirit, says he, were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free.

Now his meaning is this: that which established us to become one body and regenerated us, is one Spirit: for not in one Spirit was one baptized, and another another. And not only is that which has baptized us one, but also that unto which He baptized us, i.e., for which He baptized us, is one. For we were baptized not that so many several bodies might be formed, but that we might all preserve one with another the perfect nature of one body: i.e., that we might all be one body, into the same were we baptized.

So that both He who formed it is one, and that into which He formed it is one. And he said not, that we might all come to be of the same body; but, that we might all be one body. For he ever strives to use the more expressive phrases. And well said he, we all, adding also himself. For not even I, the Apostle, have any more than thou in this respect, says he. For you are the body even as I, and I even as thou, and we have all the same Head and have passed through the same birth-pains. Wherefore we are also the same body. And why speak I, says he, of the Jews? Since even the Gentiles who were so far off from us, He has brought into the entireness of one body. Wherefore having said, we all, he stopped not here, but added, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free. Now if, having before been so far off, we were united and have become one, much more after that we have become one, we can have no right to grieve and be dejected. Yea, the difference, in fact, has no place. For if to Greeks and Jews, to bond and free, He has vouchsafed the same blessings, how can it be that after so vouchsafing He divides them, now that He has bestowed a greater perfection of unity by the supply of His gifts?

And were all made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:14

For the body is not one member, but many.

i.e., We have come to the same initiation, we enjoy the same Table. And why said he not, we are nourished by the same body and drink the same blood? Because by saying Spirit, he declared them both, as well the flesh as the blood. For through both are we made to drink of the Spirit.

But to me he appears now to speak of that visitation of the Spirit which takes place in us after Baptism and before the Mysteries. And he said, We were made to drink, because this metaphorical speech suited him extremely well for his proposed subject: as if he had said respecting plants and a garden, that by the same fountain all the trees are watered, or by the same water; so also here, we all drank the same Spirit, we enjoyed the same grace, says he.

If now one Spirit both formed us and gathered us all together into one body; for this is the meaning of, we were baptized into one body: and vouchsafed us one table, and gave us all the same watering, (for this is the meaning of, we were made to drink into one Spirit,) and united persons so widely separated; and if many things then become a body when they are made one: why, I pray, are you continually tossing to and from their difference? But if you say, Because there are many members and diverse, know that this very thing is the wonder and the peculiar excellency of the body, when the things which are many and diverse make one. But if they were not many, it were not so wonderful and incredible that they should be one body; nay, rather they would not be a body at all.

3. This however he states last; but for the present he goes to the members themselves, saying thus:

1 Corinthians 12:15

If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

1 Corinthians 12:16

And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

For if the one being made inferior and the other superior, does not allow their being of the body, the whole is done away. Do not say therefore, I am not the body, because I am inferior. For the foot also has the inferior post, yet is it of the body: for the being or not being part of the body, is not from the one lying in this place and the other in that; (which is what constitutes difference of place;) but from the being conjoined or separated. For the being or not being a body, arises from the having been made one or not. But do thou, I pray, mark his considerate way, how he applies their words to our members. For as he said above, These things have I in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos, 1 Corinthians 4:6 just so likewise here, to make his argument free from invidiousness and acceptable, he introduces the members speaking: that when they shall hear nature answering them, being thus convicted by experience herself and by the general voice, they may have nothing further to oppose. For say, if you will, says he, this very thing, murmur as you please, you cannot be out of the body. For as the law of nature, so much more does the power of grace guard all things and preserve them entire. And see how he kept to the rule of having nothing superfluous; not working out his argument on all the members, but on two only and these the extremes; having specified both the most honorable of all, the eye, and the meanest of all, the feet. And he does not make the foot to discourse with the eye, but with the hand which is mounted a little above it; and the ear with the eyes. For because we are wont to envy not those who are very far above us, but those who are a little higher, therefore he also conducts his comparison thus.

1 Corinthians 12:17

If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

Thus, because, having fallen upon the difference of the members, and having mentioned feet, and hands, and eyes, and ears, he led them to the consideration of their own inferiority and superiority: see how again he consoles them, intimating that so it was expedient: and that their being many and diverse, this especially causes them to be a body. But if they all were some one, they would not be a body. Wherefore, he says, If they were all one member, where were the body? This however, he mentions not till afterwards; but here he points out also something more; that besides the impossibility of any one being a body, it even takes away the being of the rest.

For if the whole were hearing, where were the smelling, says he.

4. Then because after all they were yet disturbed: that which he had done above, the same he does also now. For as there he first alleged the expediency to comfort them and afterwards stopped their mouths, vehemently saying, But all these works the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one man severally even as He will: so also here having stated reasons for which he showed that it was profitable that all should so be, he refers the whole again to the counsel of God, saying,

1 Corinthians 12:18

But now God has set the members each one of them in the body, even as it pleased Him.

Even as he said of the Spirit, as He will, so also here, as it pleased Him. Now do not thou seek further into the cause, why it is thus and why not thus. For though we have ten thousand reasons to give, we shall not be so able to show them that it is well done, as when we say, that as the best Artificer pleased, so it came to pass. For as it is expedient, so He wills it. Now if in this body of ours we do not curiously enquire about the members, much more in the Church. And see his thoughtfulness in that he does not state the

difference which arises from their nature nor that from their operation, but that from their local situation. For now, says he, God has set the members each one of them in the body even as it pleased Him. And he said well, each one, pointing out that the use extends to all. For you can not say, This He has Himself placed but not that: but every one according to His will, so it is situated. So that to the foot also it is profitable that it should be so stationed, and not to the head only: and if it should invert the order and leaving its own place, should go to another, though it might seem to have bettered its condition, it would be the undoing and ruin of the whole. For it both falls from its own, and reaches not the other station.

1 Corinthians 12:19-20

5. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, but one body.

Thus having silenced them sufficiently by God's own arrangement, again he states reasons. And he neither does this always nor that, but alternates and varies his discourse. Since on the one hand, he who merely silences, confounds the hearer, and he, on the contrary, who accustoms him to demand reasons for all things, injures him in the matter of faith; for this cause then Paul is continually practising both the one and the other, that they may both believe and may not be confounded; and after silencing them, he again gives a reason likewise. And mark his earnestness in the combat and the completeness of his victory. For from what things they supposed themselves unequal in honor because in them there was great diversity, even from these things he shows that for this very reason they are equal in honor. How, I will tell you.

If all were one member, says he, where were the body?

Now what he means is, If there were not among you great diversity, you could not be a body; and not being a body, you could not be one; and not being one, you could not be equal in honor. Whence it follows again that if you were all equal in honor, you were not a body; and not being a body, you were not one; and not being one, how could ye be equal in honor? As it is, however, because you are not all endowed with some one gift, therefore are you a body; and being a body, you are all one, and differ nothing from one another in this that you are a body. So that this very difference is that which chiefly causes your equality in honor. And accordingly he adds, But now they are many members, yet one body.

6. These things then let us also consider and cast out all envy, and neither grudge against them that have greater gifts nor despise them that possess the lesser. For thus had God willed: let us then not oppose ourselves. But if you are still disturbed, consider that your work is oft-times such as your brother is unable to perform. So that even if you are inferior, yet in this you have the advantage: and though he be greater, he is worse off in this respect; and so equality takes place. For in the body even the little members seem to contribute no little, but the great ones themselves are often injured by them, I mean by their removal. Thus what in the body is more insignificant than the hair? Yet if you should remove this, insignificant as it is, from the eyebrows and the eyelids, you have destroyed all the grace of the countenance, and the eye will no longer appear equally beautiful. And yet the loss is of a trifle; but notwithstanding even thus all the comeliness is destroyed. And not the comeliness only, but much also of the use of the eyes. The reason is that every one of our members has both a working of its own and one which is common; and likewise there is in us a beauty which is peculiar and another which is common. And these kinds of beauty appear indeed to be divided, but they are perfectly bound together, and when one is destroyed, the other perishes also along with it. To explain myself: let there be bright eyes, and a smiling cheek, and a red lip, and

straight nose, and open brow; nevertheless, if you mar but the slightest of these, you have marred the common beauty of all; all is full of dejection; all will appear foul to look on, which before was so beautiful: thus if you should crush only the tip of the nose you have brought great deformity upon all: and yet it is the maiming of but a single member. And likewise in the hand, if you should take away the nail from one finger, you would see the same result. If now you would see the same taking place in respect of their function also, take away one finger, and you will see the rest less active and no longer performing their part equally.

Since then the loss of a member is a common deformity, and its safety beauty to all, let us not be lifted up nor trample on our neighbors. For through that small member even the great one is fair and beautiful, and by the eyelids, slight as they are, is the eye adorned. So that he who wars with his brother wars with himself: for the injury done reaches not only unto that one, but himself also shall undergo no small loss.

7. That this then may not be, let us care for our neighbors as for ourselves, and let us transfer this image of the body now also to the Church, and be careful for all as for our own members. For in the Church there are members many and diverse: and some are more honorable and some more deficient. For example, there are choirs of virgins, there are assemblies of widows, there are fraternities of those who shine in holy wedlock ; in short, many are the degrees of virtue. And in almsgiving again in like manner. For some empty themselves of all their goods: others care for a competency alone and seek nothing more than necessities; others give of their superfluity: nevertheless, all these adorn one another; and if the greater should set at nought the less, he would in the greatest degree injure himself. Thus, suppose a virgin to deal scornfully with a married woman, she has cut off no small part of her reward; and he again that emptied himself of all should he upbraid him that has not done so, has emptied himself of much of the fruit of his labors. And why speak I of virgins, and widows, and men without possessions? What is meaner than those who beg? And yet even these fulfill a most important office in the Church, clinging to the doors of the sanctuary and supplying one of its greatest ornaments: and without these there could be no perfecting the fullness of the Church. Which thing, as it seems, the Apostles also observing made a law from the beginning, as in regard to all other things, so also that there should be widows: and so great care did they use about the matter as also to set over them seven deacons. For as bishops and presbyters and deacons and virgins and continent persons, enter into my enumeration, where I am reckoning up the members of the Church, so also do widows. Yea, and it is no mean office which they fill. For thou indeed comest here when you will: but these both day and night sing psalms and attend: not for alms only doing this; since if that were their object, they might walk in the market place and beg in the alleys: but there is in them piety also in no small degree. At least, behold in what a furnace of poverty they are; yet never shall you hear a blasphemous word from them nor an impatient one, after the manner of many rich men's wives. Yet some of them often lie down to their rest in hunger, and others continue constantly frozen by the cold; nevertheless, they pass their time in thanksgiving and giving glory. Though you give but a penny, they give thanks and implore ten thousand blessings on the giver; and if you give nothing they do not complain, but even so they bless, and think themselves happy to enjoy their daily food.

Yes, it is replied, since whether they will or no, they must bear it. Why, tell me? Wherefore have you uttered this bitter expression? Are there not shameful arts which bring gain to the aged, both men and women? Had they not power to support themselves by those means in great abundance, provided they had chosen to cast off all care of upright living? Do you see not how many persons of that age, by becoming pimps and panders and by other such ministrations, both live, and live in luxury ? Not so these, but they choose rather to perish of hunger than to dishonor their own life and betray their salvation; and

they sit throughout the whole day, preparing a medicine of salvation for you.

For no physician stretching out the hand to apply the knife, works so effectually to cut out the corruption from our wounds, as does a poor man stretching out his right hand and receiving alms, to take away the scars which the wounds have left. And what is truly wonderful, they perform this excellent chirurgery without pain and anguish: and we who are set over the people and give you so much wholesome advice, do not more truly discourse than he does, who sits before the doors of the church, by his silence and his countenance. For we too sound these things in your ears every day, saying, Be not high-minded, O man; human nature is a thing that soon declines and is ready to fall away; our youth hastens on to old age, our beauty to deformity, our strength to weakness, our honor to contempt, our health falls away to sickness, our glory to meanness, our riches to poverty; our concerns are like a violent current that never will stand still, but keeps hastening down the steep.

The same advice do they also give and more than this, by their appearance and by their experience itself too, which is a yet plainer kind of advice. How many, for instance, of those who now sit without, were in the bloom of youth and did great things? How many of these loathsome looking persons surpassed many, both in vigor of body and in beauty of countenance? Nay, disbelieve it not nor deride. For surely, life is full of ten thousand such examples. For if from mean and humble persons many have oftentimes become kings, what marvel is it if from being great and glorious, some have been made humble and mean? Since the former is much the more extraordinary: but the latter, of perpetual occurrence. So that one ought not to be incredulous that any of them ever flourished in arts, and arms, and abundance of wealth, but rather to pity them with great compassion and to fear for ourselves, lest we too should sometime suffer the same things. For we too are men and are subject to this speedy change.

8. But perchance some one of the thoughtless, and of those who are accustomed to scoff, will object to what has been said, and will altogether deride us, saying, How long will you not cease continually introducing poor men and beggars in your discourses, and prophesying to us of misfortunes, and denouncing poverty to come, and desiring to make us beggars? Not from a desire to make beggars of you, O man, do I say these things, but hastening to open unto you the riches of heaven. Since he too, who to the healthy man makes mention of the sick and relates their anguish, says it not to make him diseased, but to preserve him in health, by the fear of their calamities cutting off his remissness. Poverty seems to you to be a fearful thing and to be dreaded, even to the mere name of it. Yea, and therefore are we poor, because we are afraid of poverty; though we have ten thousand talents. For not he who has nothing is poor, but he who shudders at poverty. Since in men's calamities also it is not those who suffer great evils whom we lament and account wretched, but those who know not how to bear them, even though they be small. Whereas he that knows how to bear them is, as all know, worthy of praises and crowns. And to prove that this is so, whom do we applaud in the games? Those who are much beaten and do not vex themselves, but hold their head on high; or those who fly after the first strokes? Are not those even crowned by us as manly and noble; while we laugh at these as unmanly and cowards? So then let us do in the affairs of life. Him that bears all easily let us crown, as we do that noble champion; but weep over him that shrinks and trembles at his dangers, and who before he receives the blow is dead with fear. For so in the games; if any before he raised his hands, at the mere sight of his adversary extending his right hand, should fly, though he receive no wound, he will be laughed to scorn as feeble and effeminate and unversed in such struggles. Now this is like what happens to these who fear poverty, and cannot so much as endure the expectation of it.

Evidently then it is not we that make you wretched, but you yourselves. For how can it be that the devil should not hence-forth make sport of you, seeing you even before the stroke afraid and trembling at the menace? Or rather, when thou dost but esteem this a threat, he will have no need so much as to strike you any more, but leaving you to keep your wealth, by the expectation of its being taken away he will render you softer than any wax. And because it is our nature (so to speak,) not to consider the objects of our dread so fearful after suffering, as before and while yet untried: therefore to prevent you from acquiring even this virtue, he detains you in the very height of fear; by the fear of poverty, before all experience of it, melting you down as wax in the fire. Yea, and such a man is softer than any wax and lives a life more wretched than Cain himself. For the things which he has in excess, he is in fear: for those which he has not, in grief; and again, concerning what he has he trembles, keeping his wealth within as a wilful runaway slave, and beset by I know not what various and unaccountable passions. For unaccountable desire, and manifold fear and anxiety, and trembling on every side, agitate them. And they are like a vessel driven by contrary winds from every quarter, and enduring many heavy seas. And how much better for such a man to depart than to be enduring a continual storm? Since for Cain also it were more tolerable to have died than to be for ever trembling.

Lest we then for our part suffer these things, let us laugh to scorn the device of the devil, let us burst his cords asunder, let us sever the point of his terrible spear and fortify every approach. For if you laugh at money, he has not where to strike, he has not where he may lay hold. Then have you rooted up the root of evils; and when the root is no more, neither will any evil fruit grow.

9. Well: these things we are always saying and never leave off saying them: but whether our sayings do any good, the day will declare, even that day which is revealed by fire, which tries every man's work, 1 Corinthians 3:13 which shows what lamps are bright and what are not so. Then shall he who has oil, and he who has it not, be manifest. But may none then be found destitute of the comfort; rather may all, bringing in with them abundance of mercy, and having their lamps bright, enter in together with the Bridegroom.

Since nothing is more fearful and full of anguish than that voice which they who departed without abundant almsgiving shall then hear the Bridegroom, I know you not. Matthew 25:12 But may we never hear this voice, but rather that most pleasant and desirable one, Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Matthew 25:34 For thus shall we live the happy life, and enjoy all the good things which even pass man's understanding: unto which may we all attain, through the grace and mercy, etc.

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